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September 23, 1879.

Vol. V.

Single
Number.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 113.

JACK HOYLE, THE YOUNG SPECULATOR; or, THE ROAD TO FORTUNE.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK," "THE DOUBLE DAGGERS," "CLOVEN HOOF," "BUFFALO BEN," "BOB WOOLF," "WILD IVAN," ETC., ETC.



JACK WAS SUDDENLY SNATCHED FROM HIS SADDLE BY A ROPE THAT TIGHTENED AROUND HIS WAIST, AND FOUND HIMSELF SWINGING IN MID-AIR.

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ROB," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A BLOW FOR JACK HOYLE.

"MASTER JACK HOYLE!"

"Yes, sir," and the youth stepped from his desk in the counting-room of Hoyle and Tremaine, to an adjoining room, or office of the firm.

"What is it, Mr. Tremaine?"

"Be seated," the elderly gentleman said, motioning Jack to a seat. "When were you last at home, sir?"

The youth looked sheepish.

"Not since Wednesday; to-day is Friday," was the hesitating reply.

"So I had heard. Where were you?"

"Is it important that you should know so much of my business, sir?" Jack flashed back.

"Certainly, sir. I am your employer, and I have a right to know."

"I do not think so, Mr. Tremaine. My father yet happens to be my manager."

"He was, but alas for you is so no more. Your estimable father is dead!"

Jack staggered back as if he had been shot, his face growing deathly white.

"My father dead, sir? Impossible, or I should have heard of it."

"It is true, and your mother, too, is dead. Both died within an hour of each other, and were buried last evening at sunset."

With a groan Jackson Hoyle bowed his head upon his hands, and shook with emotion. No tears came—his grief was too poignant.

When he looked up, he was more composed. His frank, handsome face was very grave, but there lingered about his mouth the expression of a firm resolution.

"Tell me all," he said in a choked voice. "I want to know the worst."

Addison Tremaine cleared his throat, before answering.

"Your father died insolvent," he said, with quiet triumph in his tones. "It was the blow of his financial collapse which killed him and your mother. His expenses of late years have been very great—you have been the principal cause. Through gambling and trifling of all kinds, you have cost him a fortune."

Jack did not refute the charge. He knew that the late partner of his father had spoken the truth.

He had been a spoiled child from infancy, and was now eighteen; he had been the wildest young rascal in the city of Lowell. Spendthrift, sport and dare-devil as he had been, it were but natural that he had gone from bad to worse, until no folly was too great for him to commit.

His parents were both easy-going people, and after years of trial to wean Jack from his bad habits, had finally given the job up as one of the things impossible.

The firm of Hoyle and Tremaine had been one of the most notable in all Lowell. For soundness they were considered "A No. 1," having unquestioned credit, and transacting a vast amount of business.

Edwin Hoyle had for many years been one of the leading men of the city, both in social and financial standing, moving in the best circles of society, and owning the handsomest estates, carriages, horses and other appurtenances.

This fact was mainly what had kept Jack from utter ruin. For his father's sake the world did not wholly turn him over to the bad.

"I cannot see how my father died insolvent," Jack said, eying Tremaine sharply. "His wealth has been estimated at a million of dollars!"

"But it was a wrong calculation. A recent settlement of our business discovered the startling fact that your father had largely speculated and lost with the firm's money, and what with that which you have squandered, he was actually my debtor to an amount that will cover all the real estate and personal property he possessed."

"I suppose you can prove this, sir?" Jack said, a quick flash in his eye.

"I can prove it," Tremaine said, calmly.

"Your father, on settlement, gave me a mortgage upon all the property—everything."

"How long does this mortgage run?"

"Five years."

"Very well. How much is this firm indebted to Jack Hoyle, Esquire?"

Addison Tremaine turned to his desk, and looked at his books, with a smile.

"Sixteen cents," he said, with a slight chuckle.

"Hardly enough to let you smell of a champagne bottle," and with a grin Tremaine poured out the requisite amount in pennies; "that balances accounts."

"Perhaps! but you are not done with me yet, for I shall cause an investigation of my father's accounts, some day, and we'll see by what means you have so suddenly become possessed of all the wealth of the firm."

"Ha! ha! you talk largely for a pauper, my lad!"

"Look out, sir—don't you dare to call me that, again!" Jack cried, aroused to sudden fierceness. "To be sure I have but sixteen cents in the world, but that shall be the foundation of a great fortune. I shall henceforth work only to that end—money, honestly gotten, shall be my sole ambition. That you shall never foreclose that mortgage I am resolved, and when it comes due, you will find Jack Hoyle ready to show his hand."

"Perhaps," Tremaine said, sarcastically, and then he turned to his books while Jack passed into the counting-room for his hat and coat, and then went out upon the street.

Neither looking right or left, nor recognizing his old chums, Jack hurried on to his old home—a handsome mansion set down in a park of well-trimmed shrubs and trees, on the outskirts of the town.

Entering the park, Jack found the house open and in the charge of an old servant, named Jacobs, who had been in his father's employ for years.

"Ah! Master Jack, is it you?" the old man exclaimed, joyfully, grasping Jack by the hand, tears trickling down his cheeks. "Come back to look at the old home, Jack, boy?"

"Yes, Jacobs—I've come back to look over the place before I set out to make my fortune."

"Your fortune, Jack? Ah! my lad, I'm afraid it's a sorry fortune you'll ever make, yourself," the old servant said, with a grim shake of his head. "Twixt you and Satan's body-guard the pennies never gather."

"Oh! well, you'll see, Jacobs. I'll yet reign here at Maple Park, and have you with me. I have just sixteen cents left, and that amount shall be the basis of my labors—the corner stone of the foundation of my fortune. Sink or swim, fight or fail, survive or perish, I'm going to lift this mortgage from my old home, and show the wisecracks of the town that Jack Hoyle was better than a lost trick, after all."

After looking through the house, and gathering a few clothes, and some relics, he took his departure.

During his first half hour's ramble, he approached the imposing mansion of Addison Lorne, one of Lowell's financial pillars and largest factory owners.

Mounting the steps, he rung the bell, resolved to pay the Lornes a call—especially Miss Lillian, whom he had called upon many times, as she seemed to like him.

It had one time been reported that he and Miss Lillian were engaged, but matters had not progressed so far between them, as yet.

Jack was admitted by a servant, and shown into the grand parlor, where he was left while the servant went to apprise Miss Lillian.

He was gone some time, and when he returned he handed Jack a delicate missive, which he began to read, eagerly. But he soon grew pale, and his teeth shut together with an ominous click.

The letter ran as follows:

"MR. HOYLE: DEAR SIR: Owing to circumstances which must be well known to you, I cannot see you any more. It pains me to make this announcement, but the difference in our positions in life, hereafter, must be so great, that it becomes necessary to draw a line between friendship and knowledge of each other. Hoping you may succeed, I remain, truly,
"LILLIAN LORNE."

As he finished reading this strange note, there was a mocking little laugh, and Jack looked up to see Tom Tremaine standing just within the room, a cynical smile upon his features.

Tremaine was the broker's son, and as vain and conceited as a turkey gobbler, consequently he and Jack had never gotten along well together.

"Ha! ha! lost your sweetness, eh?" the cockcomb now exclaimed, with sarcasm. "It is impossible for Miss Lorne to see you, is it not, friend Hoyle?"

"That is none of your business," Jack replied, haughtily. "I am about to quit the field, myself, and you can have the leavings, such as they are, if you want them." And with a stiff bow he left the house.

This was a blow he had not expected, and it stung him to see how great was the distinction between wealth and poverty.

"But, never mind," he muttered. "It will be queer if I don't come back to Lowell, some day, rich enough to buy the aristocrats all out."

He was fully decided to pull out of the manufacturing city, to seek his fortune elsewhere, and the sooner he went, the quicker he would enter upon his redemption of character and wealth.

He accordingly spent the afternoon in the cemetery, working over the graves of his parents, and by sunset had them carefully sodded, and choice flowers planted around them.

Then, sachel in hand, he started out of town, by a street leading countryward, scarcely knowing where he was aiming for.

Just before he reached the outskirts of the town he heard his name called, and found himself in front of a minister's cottage.

On looking over into the well-kept lawn, he saw some one beckoning to him, and that some one none other than Bessie Bond, the rector's daughter.

Entering, he was met by Bessie and the rector in person, who warmly shook him by the hand, and invited him into the cottage parlor. It was a cosy little place, and for the first Jack began to realize what it was to have a home.

"My son," the rector said, when they were seated, "we are comparatively strangers to you, but your father was a warm friend of mine, and I naturally take an interest in you. Bessie saw you passing, sachel in hand, and I had her call to you. Leaving Lowell, my boy?"

"Yes, Mr. Bond—pulling out to make my fortune," Jack replied, with a faint smile. "Lowell has known me while I have been sowing my wild oats, and I am going away to seek an honorable name and fortune."

"Which is your right course to pursue. Where are you bound?"

"I do not know—wherever the tide of passing events drifts me, I suppose."

"I hear that the financial crash has swept everything your poor father possessed. Is it true?"

"I was told so for the first, this morning, sir, after I had recovered from a spree. I did not even know till then that my parents were dead."

"It must be a terrible blow to you!"

"Just how terrible, Mr. Bond, you can never, never imagine. I am not one to publicly expose my grief, but it is very deep, all the same. I am, however, a changed boy. The Jack Hoyle of yesterday and the Jack Hoyle of to-day, are two different persons. My awakening has been a great blow, but it has made a man of me."

"God be praised," the reverend gentleman said, earnestly, while gladness beamed from pretty little Bessie's countenance. "I believe you are changed for the better, and I am proud of you. It is late, to-night, and you must not think of going on, any further. The Rectory shall furnish you a welcome till you choose to go on."

"I thank you, gratefully, Mr. Bond, but I had rather go on my way," Jack declared, firmly. "No time like the present, you know."

"Nevertheless, we shall insist upon your staying here," Bessie, the rector's sweet-faced, sunny-haired daughter chimed in. "To-morrow you will feel stronger to battle with the world."

So Jack yielded, and consented to spend the night at the Rectory.

Mr. Bond and Bessie lived all alone, but Jack could not remember of ever having spent a more pleasant evening. The rector was a good man, and the fatherly advice he vouchsafed was such as favorably impressed Jack, and when he retired to rest and looked forward into the future, the undertaking did not seem half so great as it had a few hours before.

Then, Bessie was a sweet little maiden of sixteen, free from the formal mannerisms of society, and she and Jack at once became famous friends.

A little woman she was of great worth, brilliant in intellect and education, and charming to know, with her thoughtful consideration, her sweetness and guileless innocence.

But woman-like, she was afflicted with a little curiosity, and did not hesitate to betray it.

"You called upon Miss Lorne, I suppose, and said your farewells, Mr. Hoyle?" she said, when the rector had stepped out. "Lillian always appeared to be such a nice girl."

"Appearances are often deceitful," Jack re-

plied, flushing a little. "At least you can see that they are in Miss Lorne's case," and he handed Bessie the note he had received from the great financier's daughter.

As Bessie read it through, an expression of indignation settled on her countenance.

"How cruel in her," she said, looking up, with flashing eyes. "If I were you, Mr. Hoyle, I should hereafter count her out of my list of acquaintances."

"I presume I shall," Jack replied, dryly. "But I am not going to mourn after her. She has simply unmasked—that is all."

A pleasant evening it was, and Jack almost regretted when it came time to retire.

In the morning, after a good breakfast, Jack bade the good rector adieu, and took his leave.

Bessie accompanied him to the gate and shook hands with him for the last time.

"Write to me, Jack, and tell me of your struggles, and I will answer you," she said, and after promising to do so, Jack stole a kiss, and tramped away out of Lowell, the image of pretty Bessie engraven upon his memory, and the parting words of the good rector ringing in his ears:

"Be temperate, faithful and honest, Jack; seek not for friends, for friends you would most love to have will come to you unsought."

And with this thought uppermost in his mind, Jack Hoyle started out upon the world, to make his fortune.

CHAPTER II.

A "CORNER" IN CATS.

WITH a brave front, Jack tramped out of the town, meeting several of his old associates but noticing none, except one, a man by the name of Harry Hunter, who was a gambler by profession.

"What! ain't goin' to leave us?" Hunter demanded, stopping Jack.

"Yes, as you see," Jack replied.

"Where bound?"

"Anywhere where I can make a fortune," was the reliant answer.

"The old man didn't pan you out nothing, eh?"

"No! Tremaine roped in all there was."

"He's an old rascal, take my word for it!"

"Do you really think so?"

"Of course! A man who will cheat at a sociable game of eucher, will cheat at any other game. You ought to put a tracer after this man, and your father's property."

"Perhaps I had. The mortgage comes due in five years. Tell you what I'll do—I'll give you half of all you recover from Tremaine, that he has embezzled or fraudulently obtained from my father."

"Agreed. I'll have you rich again, some day, Jack. Want a little cash to help you along?"

"No, I thank you. I have got sixteen cents which is to be the basis of my fortune. Good-by, Harry. Give my respects to my friends and a smile of scorn to my enemies."

The first day of Jack's travel revealed no incident worthy of record, and he slept in a hay-mow at night.

In the morning, he asked for one cent's worth of milk of a dairyman, and the man being of a liberal turn of mind dealt out a quart of his richest and some bread in the bargain.

While Jack was eating his meal upon the doorstep, he noticed a swarm of cats, twenty or thirty, come from the woods in a sort of procession, each one carrying in its mouth a chip-munk, or a bird, or a field-mouse.

"Pretty good cats," Jack remarked, to the dairymaid.

"Och! yis, sur," she replied, "niver a foiner lot of cats is there in the world."

When the farmer came along, again, Jack said to him:

"A fine lot of cats, sir."

"Humph! I wish some fellow'd take the job of drownin' the ravenous things," was the reply.

"I'll buy them of you, if you will sell them reasonably," Jack said.

"All right, young feller—what'll you give for the lot—twenty-five cents?"

"Just fifteen cents, and you deliver 'em to me, in Boston."

"Agreed! Am goin' to town, to-night. Where shall I leave 'em?"

Jack named the store of an acquaintance. "I will be there when you come."

"Mebbe 'tain't none o' my business, young feller, but what are you going to do wi' them ser-enaders?"

"Speculate on 'em," Jack replied, as he took his departure.

Striking cross-lots from the farm-house, he struck the Boston, Lowell and Nashua railroad, and following the track, reached the city of Boston early in the afternoon, without a penny in his pocket.

But not despairing, he wended his way to Beekman's storehouse in Congress street, and found his college chum, Bob Beekman, in attendance.

The greeting between the two young men was warm, and after some conversation, Jack succeeded in borrowing ten dollars of Bob, and also a corner in the warehouse in which to leave his cats.

He then visited several of the leading newspaper offices, and contracted for an advertisement something after this pattern:

"AN EXTRAORDINARY NOVELTY."

"Just received at Beekman's warehouse, in Congress street, an importation of the celebrated Belgium mousers—the best breed of game-hunting cats in existence. The only ones in this country for sale. Call early for a choice."

"(Signed) MONSIEUR JOHAN HOLLE."

This done, Jack returned to the warehouse.

Just at dusk, farmer Duncan drove up with a crate full of cats, and after receiving the cats, and storing them in the warehouse for the night, Jack sought out a cheap hotel, procured a "square" meal and lodging for the night.

Early in the following morning he was at the warehouse, with shears and ribbons, and soon had the Thomas cats satisfactorily clipped and named, with ribbons about their necks, and the whiskers closely clipped from the females, to give them an odd appearance.

He then arranged them upon benches, and by the time he was ready, curious people began to drop in to see the cats.

There were cats of both sexes and all colors and temperaments, from the humped-back, prowling Thomas to the purring domestic, and altogether they were an intelligent looking lot.

The forenoon passed and though many visitors called, none seemed disposed to invest; not a sale was effected.

After dinner, as he was wondering if he had not made a disastrous failure, Jack was electrified to see Mr. Lorne and his daughter, of Lowell, drive up to the storehouse, and get out.

Quickly substituting Bob Beekman as salesman, Jack retired behind some drygoods boxes, for he had no desire to meet the haughty Miss Lillian in his capacity of cat-vender.

The Lornes entered, and Bob graciously showed them the cats, pointing out the extraordinary merits of each animal, and "cheeking" his way right into the confidence of the Lowell financier.

"If you want cats," said Bob, with great importance, "now is your time to get one of the celebrated breed of mousers, as it is doubtful if the Belgian Government will allow Monsieur Holle to bring over another importation. There is the red female cat, with the almond-eyes, warranted to be a thoroughbred hunter, and also a pet family cat of cleanly habits. That is the flower of the cat flock—price \$200. Any of the others we will let go for one hundred and seventy-five, cash."

"The price is exorbitant," Lorne said, reflectively, "but I believe I will take the reddish cat. Can you box it and send it to Lowell, by express?"

"Oh! certainly," Bob hastened to say. "It will reach you on the first train."

Accordingly the Lowell financier paid the two hundred dollars, left his address, and then drove away.

After they had gone, Jack emerged from his concealment, and collared Bob.

"Bob Beekman, you are a rascal!" he exclaimed, laughing. "I should have sold any cat in the flock for ten dollars."

"And made a goose of yourself," Bob replied. "Such men as Lorne always pay for being rich."

Toward evening an old lady from the country hobbled in, and viewed the cats, with evident admiration. Her fancy seemed to be set upon one striped feline of serenading proclivities.

"Let me sell you that mouser, ma'am," Jack said, courteously. "You're an old lady; we'll sell you that cat for ten dollars. Good mouser; eats whatever you give her, and a faithful family cat."

"Well, well. That's a big price, but I want jest sech a cat. Take nine dollars for it?"

"Yes—give us the cash, and take the cat."

The old lady paid that sum and tucking Thomas under her arm, hobbled out.

She had not got off the platform, when Bob and Jack saw farmer Duncan rush up to her, excitedly.

"For Lord's sake, mother, what are you doing with that cat?" he was heard to exclaim.

"Cat?" the old lady exclaimed, proudly; "why, Josiah, that's one o' the Belgium mousers, w'at ar' advertised in ther *Transcript*. Old Lorne, up at Lowell got one, an' paid two hundred dollars for it, an' this animal only cost me nine dollars."

"You old fool!" the farmer exclaimed, aghast. "That's one of our own cats, what I sold last night to that chap in the storehouse for less than a cent apiece. And he's beat you clean out o' your eyes!"

"No he hasn't!" stoutly averred the old lady. "That cat cum frum Belg'um. Didn't I read about et in the *Transcript*? I reckon yer mother knows what she's about, Josiah Duncan. I 'arned thet nine dollars a-pickin' berries, an' ef I want ter buy cats with it, I'm a-goin' ter buy cats. Come, start along, and don't make a monkey of yourself here before folks."

The old lady won the day, and the farmer went away with her, grumblingly.

"I'm heartily ashamed of that sale," Jack said, gazing after them.

"Get out," Bob replied. "The old lady has got a good mouser, and that's an equivalent to her money."

Duncan, however, was not satisfied, for Jack received a note from him, which read as follows:

"You're a sharp young cuss, ef I do say it, an' when ye b'y any more cats o' me fer nothin', an' sell 'em back fer nine dollars apiece, jest let me know! JOSEPH DUNCAN."

No more sales were effected that day, and paying back the ten dollars he had borrowed, Jack went to his hotel nearly two hundred dollars richer than he was in the morning.

But he was destined not to make any more out of his cat speculation, for the warehouse burnt to the ground that night, and the "Belgium" cats were consumed in it.

Thus the young speculator was thrown out of his occupation, and was obliged to turn his wits in some other channel.

For several days he wandered around the "Hub," on the outlook for something to turn up.

One day as he was passing through the west portion of the city, he saw a little house and lot for sale. It was dilapidated and shabby enough, but a little money and much work would put it in a habitable condition.

The owner was an Irishman, who wanted very much to sell and go back to the Emerald sod. Accordingly Jack struck a bargain with him, and bought the place for one hundred dollars cash.

Then he bought a brush and some paint, together with some other materials, and set to work improving the place, and by the time he had completed them, his means were nearly exhausted. The property, however, looked a hundred per cent better. The house was painted inside and out, papered and thoroughly cleaned, and one day as he was finishing up, a real estate agent came along, and stepped in to view the premises.

"Well, well, you have wrought a change," he said, approvingly. "Going to live here, yourself, young man?"

"No," Jack replied.

"Going to sell it, I presume?"

"I presume so, too, if I can get my price."

"How much do you want for it?"

"Fifteen hundred dollars!"

"Pshaw! you can't get a third of that!"

"Then I won't sell. It will rent for fifteen dollars a month."

"Give you five hundred, just as it stands, young feller."

"No you won't," Jack replied, and with a grim "humph" the man went off.

That night Jack succeeded in renting the place for fifteen dollars a month to a railroad mechanic, and on receiving the first month's rent in advance, he invested half of it in insurance on his house.

Another week spent in Boston convinced him that he had made about all he could there for the present, and he resolved to pull for Philadelphia, and try his luck there.

As luck would have it, he applied for and obtained a position as snare drummer in a traveling theatrical company, at a salary of five dollars a week and expenses, and found himself one month later in Philadelphia, with twenty dollars in his pocket.

It was now in the month of October; his summer clothing was getting thin; it was necessary to make money with which to procure warmer raiment; but how to get it, was the question.

In all probability he could find work, at low

wages, but this was not exactly what he desired. He professed to use his wits in speculation, for with a fortune to make in five years his wits must be his paymaster.

Boarding at the hotels was at present too expensive, and so he rented a room over a little grocery on Race street, for four dollars a month, furnished with a bed and a chair.

Here he slept at night, and picked up his meals wherever he could get them.

Little by little his money dribbled away, and still no way of adding to his stock.

Finally, one day he bought a small stock of tobacconist's goods, at auction, for five dollars, rented a stall in Washington market for three dollars more, and "went in business." But, it didn't pay, and he sold out within a week for fifteen dollars.

With this he purchased a pack of goods, and started out on a tramp through the country; but this he found to be a very disagreeable and a poor paying avocation.

The first of January saw him upon the streets of Erie, Pennsylvania, footsore, with only fifty dollars in pocket as the result of over two months' irksome labor.

While eating supper in a restaurant he picked up a Buffalo daily paper, when his eye fell upon the following advertisement:

"WANTED: A manager with a little capital, to take a minstrel concert company upon the road. A rare opportunity to the right party. Call at Continental Hotel."

He resolved to go to Buffalo, N. Y., and see the advertiser. The idea struck him as good, so he took the cars for Buffalo.

On arrival there he applied at the Continental Hotel, and found the advertiser, a man by the name of Worley, who claimed that he was a comedian of no mean ability, who had met with reverses, but was willing to travel cheap. His company embraced five performers besides himself, all of whom were out of employment, and desired to travel.

In a little room on Mill street the company gave a rehearsal, and Jack was satisfied that the entertainment would "take," so he resolved to run them on a trip through the oil regions of Pennsylvania, then in the height of their excitement.

Borrowing a hundred dollars from one of the performer's friends, and securing printed bills by a half advance payment, he sent a man in advance to announce the show, which of course he christened with a high-sounding title.

The first trial was to be Erie.

In the meantime, Jack, who had assumed another name for the occasion, drilled his company twice daily, added several musicians, and finally had his "troupe" organized with ten members.

The pay of these amounted to ten dollars per day, besides their hotel bills and car fares, which he calculated would average thirty more. After that he had the opera-house bill to pay, and the expenses of his advance agent, so that upon figuring it all up, he counted his total expenses at one hundred dollars per day.

Seven days after his advance man had gone, he started for Erie with his troupe, having barely enough money to pay the car-fare.

Arrived at Erie, he found the prospects anything but flattering.

The town was suffering most intensely with cold weather; from off the lake a furious snow-storm was blowing, and the people were securely housed.

On inquiry he found that very little interest had been aroused concerning the show, and there were no prospects of a "house" at all.

CHAPTER III.

HOW JACK GOT A HOUSE.

"You will do well if you get fifty cents to-night," the manager of the opera-house said, when Jack approached him on the subject. "A little one-horse troupe went to smash here, a few nights ago, on account of the poor weather."

"It looks dubious," Jack was forced to admit, "but my company shall play if every seat is vacant, provided you will let me have the hall."

"Yes, you can have it, if you will give me twenty per cent of the gross receipts. I may possibly get enough to pay for fire and light."

And so it was arranged.

After dinner Jack raked together enough money out of the company to hire a band-sleigh, and about sunset the storm abated sufficient for a parade in the principal streets. All of his own company played or sung well, and their music attracted attention.

After this parade, Jack spruced himself up and called upon Mrs. L—, one of the society "leaders" of Erie.

The lady received him in some surprise, and with some hesitation he made known his errand:

"I am manager of the minstrel troupe that is to appear at the opera-house to-night, and I came to learn if it was your intention to attend?" he said, respectfully.

"It is not," was the reply. "The weather is rather too cold for amusements."

"Very true. But I would be willing to pay you to come to-night, as where you go others will go, and I can thus perhaps get enough of a house to pay my expenses. Otherwise, I shall have to disband my troupe in the outset. This will be very hard indeed on my excellent men."

"You are very complimentary, sir, but I care not for that. If my presence will in any way affect your receipts, it will give me pleasure to attend."

"Thanks, lady. Your kindness I shall not forget. Here are tickets for four of the choicest seats."

Then Jack took his leave, wondering what his experiment was likely to amount to. On arriving at the hotel, he told Worley of it, and the comedian laughed heartily.

"You have cheek enough to succeed in any enterprise!" he declared. "If the lady comes, we'll do the best we know how."

From that time until dusk Jack had a squad of boys distributing dodgers around the city, thus keeping the subject of the show fresh in the people's minds.

When the hour for the doors to open arrived, Jack entered the reserved seat office to look at the diagram. His landlord was also there, looking it over, with evident satisfaction.

"I am glad I consented to take twenty per cent of the gross," he said, smiling, "for over a hundred seats are sold—the fattest sheet, by all odds, we've had for a month! But what mystifies me, is, what brings the elite out to-night? I should sooner have expected to see Lake Erie thaw up."

Jack smiled, but did not reply.

Evident it was that his little maneuver was to work him profit.

The opera-house owner took charge of the ticket office, while Jack attended to the door, and it was with a thrill of joy that he watched the first customer purchase a ticket and enter.

It was a new undertaking, and had looked very dubious, but his pulses began to throb once more when he saw that there was prospect of a good house.

The band gave a rehearsal before the opera-house, and despite the wintry blasts attracted a large crowd; then the performers went into the theater, and the people began to crowd the doors.

Not in ones or twos, but in dozens, of both sexes and all stations in life.

A dozen or more private carriages halted before the hall and were unfreighted of well-dressed ladies and gentlemen—others came by the cars, or on foot, and paid their way into the show that had a few hours before promised to be a dire failure.

A short time before the curtain raised, Mrs. L— and her suite entered, and she smiled triumphantly as she caught Jack's eye, as much as to say: "I am the cause of all this assembling of people."

She was a royally beautiful woman, and Jack felt that it was an honor to have her attend.

At last the curtain rolled up on the handsomely-set first part, in the presence of a very large audience.

The opera-house proprietor stepped in from the box-office, and looked over the assemblage with an approving nod of his head.

"Good house," he said—"good house, but it's miraculous, sir—miraculous!"

"How much are the receipts?" asked Jack, well pleased at the success.

"Don't know. Somewhere nigh seven hundred dollars, I reckon. Here's a package that was left for you at the box-office."

Jack tore open the dainty envelope, and his surprise knew no bounds when he read the following:

"ERIE, Pa., JANUARY —, 18—.

MANAGER—

DEAR SIR: The presence of yourself and company is respectfully invited at Mrs. L—'s, at the conclusion of the entertainment, this evening.

"BY ORDER OF COMMITTEE."

Whatever might have been Jack's elation before, it was a hundredfold increased, now.

After the first part was finished, he took opportunity to go behind the scenes and show the invitation to the company, and they were greatly pleased.

The entertainment was a success, and heartily

applauded by the audience, and after the show had dismissed, Jack found himself the possessor of five hundred and fifty dollars as his share of the receipts; he felt that he had struck the right road to fortune.

With his company, he then resorted to Mrs. L—'s, and found a banquet awaiting them, and also a crowd of the elite to do honor to the occasion.

To his satisfaction his company carried themselves with perfect decorum, and although a trifle bashful, he managed to carry his own part as became him. Mrs. L— was his chaperone for the evening, and he had the pleasure of an introduction into the first society of Erie.

A ball wound up the festivities, and when Jack went back to the hotel with his company, he was satisfied that he and his company had established their reputation from the start.

The morning papers favorably noticed the show, and the banquet; and, wide awake to business, Jack purchased a whole edition of these, and sent them on for free distribution in the towns they were to visit.

From Erie they struck down into the oil country, visiting Corry, Titusville, Meadville, Oil City and Pittsburg, and drawing full houses in each place. The oil towns at that time were "red-hot" show-towns, and turned out liberally to patronize his entertainment.

On the termination of their engagement in Pittsburg, Jack was taken sick with typhoid fever, and sold out his management to Worley for two hundred dollars. The show went to pieces a few weeks later, in Ohio, Worley having sloped with the receipts!

Out of this speculation Jack had cleared seventeen hundred dollars, which was an extraordinary success.

For two weeks he lay very ill in the smoky city, and when he was able to get around, he left for Ohio, finally bringing up in Cleveland.

His illness had consumed over a hundred dollars of his money, and he began to look around for a place to invest the remainder, lest that too, should go.

The first week of his stay in Cleveland, he wrote to and received an answer from Bessie Bond. By it he learned that detectives were looking into the matter of his father's property, and that Addison Tremaine was talking of quitting Lowell.

"The scoundrel," Jack muttered; "that fact betrays his guilt. I hope that my friend will not let him escape."

Bessie went on to say how the Lorne's had paid two hundred dollars for a cat in Boston, that had since manifested its "Belgian" breeding, by clawing Miss Lillian in the face, going through a great mirror, and killing all of Mr. Lorne's choicest birds.

Jack was compelled to laugh over this news, although he could but feel guilty about his cat speculation.

One day he fell, and both sprained his ankle, and seriously bruised his body. He had to be carried to his hotel. A doctor was called who applied a liniment that in three days put Jack on his feet again. The liniment had wrought miracles!

"What will you take for the receipt for that liniment?" the young speculator asked, as he was paying his bill.

"Twenty dollars, reserving the privilege to use it in my practice," the man replied.

"Agreed. Give me the receipt, and here are your twenty dollars," and Jack was soon in possession of his liquid bonanza. So, packing his trunk, he took the cars for New York at once.

It was now in the latter part of March, and being an early spring, the weather was getting pleasant.

On arriving in New York, he rented a couple of rooms, and furnished the one with a cosy bedroom set, while he fitted the other up as a laboratory.

Then he purchased a couple of hundred dollars' worth of materials, such as was required to manufacture his liniment. Now to get his liniment a name! He went to a well-known physician with a sample of his preparation, and offered a partnership, in consideration that the doctor would permit the liniment to be named after him, would take charge of the sales and advertising business, furnish half of the capital required in the manufacture, and take half the net profits.

After some deliberation the man of medicine, who was shrewd enough to see money in the adventure, consented, and gave Jack access to his bank account.

Once more, accordingly, Jack found himself on the road to fortune.

Contracting with a noted glass manufactory

for a hundred thousand bottles, he at once set to work in earnest at manufacturing his liniment.

In his little laboratory he now spent the greater share of his time, and turned out about two hundred bottles per day. The doctor at once contracted with the famous Rowell advertising firm for ads. in all the principal papers of the U. S., and dispatched agents to the wholesale dealers in the various States to introduce and sell the liniment.

But for the fact that the doctor had a good bank account at his disposal, the concern must have gone to smash, for the initiatory expenses were enormous, and Jack's small pile was but as a drop in the ocean.

The first month things looked desperate, and Dr. P., as we shall name him, was fully as despairing as Jack. The agents reported poor success, and orders came in very sparingly.

"It's little use to continue making what won't sell," the doctor said, as he and Jack consulted, in the laboratory, one day at the end of the third month. "I'm out of pocket about twenty thousand dollars, and the receipts have not yet reached a tenth part of that sum. I'm heartily sick of the venture, and want to sell out!"

"Ditto I," Jack replied, dubiously. "I'm fifteen hundred dollars deep, and haven't got a red in my pocket to-day. What will you give me for sole possession?"

"A hundred dollars. Perhaps I can get back that much out of it."

"I'll take it," Jack said, glad to get even that much.

The doctor accordingly paid him over a hundred dollars, and, first signing off his right and title, Jack left the laboratory, and found himself upon the streets of New York, out of employment.

What next to turn to, he was puzzled to know.

His latter speculation had reduced his fortune to a hundred dollars, cash, and one house and lot in Boston.

The rent upon this place was overdue several months, but he had left the collection in charge of Bob Beekman, and found it unnecessary to return to Boston.

Reports were daily coming in of the "red-hot" times up in the Pennsylvania oil regions, and acting upon impulse, he bought him a ticket for Oil City, Pa.

Arrived there he found that he was not yet in the heart of the oil regions, and accordingly visited Titusville, Pleasantville, Shamburg and Red Hot, bringing up in the latter place for a short stay.

A chance was offered in a new lease for investment in shares, fifty dollars purchasing a fortieth share. He accordingly invested fifty, and had now twelve dollars left, which was in those days equivalent to one week's board.

He saw that work was what he must now resort to, and he hired out to run an engine on a pumping well, at three dollars per day and board.

It was dirty, greasy work, and the first year's anniversary of his struggle for a fortune found him as black and grimy as could well be imagined.

Resolved to be temperate, he associated only with those whose society was not likely to lead him into temptation. Consequently he got the nickname from the rougher classes of the "Parson," and it clung to him as long as he remained in Red Hot.

In those days the towns of Shamburg, Red Hot and Tip-Top were acknowledged to be the wickedest in the United States, while Petroleum Center, Tideoute and Rouseville were not far behind.

The men were, with the exception of a few speculators and prospectors, a lawless, daredevil crowd; the scum and ruffianly element of the different States seemed to be concentrated in the few oil towns we have above named.

To save their earnings was not the least part of their calculation; consequently fights, drunkenness, and sprees were the order of the hour.

Jack's quietness and sobriety were a theme of conversation among the roughs, for it was something beyond their comprehension. Not another young man in Red Hot who did not step up to the bar and take his "rations" as often as the condition of his cash account would allow, and to have one "teetotaler" in the town was against the moral principles of the rougher element.

At this period the notorious Ben Hogan bossed things in Red Hot—was feared as a desperado and a pugilist of no mean order.

One night Jack was sitting in the bar-room of

the Draper House, when Hogan approached him, as usual in an intoxicated condition.

"See heer, young feller, you've got to step up to the bar and take your whisky, to-night. Ye've played Parson long enough, an' we're goin' ter make ye swaller yer rations, you bet! Cum along now—it ain't a-goin' ter cost you nothin' ter drink wi' Ben Hogan!"

CHAPTER IV. WHISKY AND OIL.

"I RATHER guess not," Jack replied, quietly. "I don't drink anything, thank you."

"Can't help that, my younker. You've got ter drink with Ben Hogan, or skip out o' the town, I tell ye! There don't no chap sail around this town, 'cept they've drank wi' old Ben, ye know, an' I ain't goin' ter allow no exceptions, I say."

"You'll have to out-drink me then if I start in, before I give up," Jack said, a little angered. "I presume if I was to try, I could drink any six men in the town drunk and sober again."

"See heer, Parson, ef that's yer game, we'll give ye a chance. I'll bet ye two hundred dollars that you can't drink me drunk, and you stay sober."

"Agreed, if by so doing, it will free me from your invitations to drink, hereafter," Jack said.

"All right! Ye shall have yer choice of beverage, an' I'll take whatever you do. Ef you've got fourth-sand rock to git old Ben Hogan b'ilin', I'll let ye alone in the future, and pay for the chain-lightnin' besides."

"Then meet me here, to-morrow night, and we'll settle the matter," Jack said, turning to his paper, which he had been reading.

After Ben Hogan and his crowd had departed, and the saloon was partly emptied, Mike Callahan came from behind the bar.

"So you're goin' ter drink ag'in' old Ben, eh, Parson?" he said, grimly.

"Yes, that's the agreement," Jack replied, yawning.

"But, I reckon yer off yer groove, Parson. Ben 'll drink you blind an' stiff, ere you know it."

"I'll bet he won't! See here. I've noticed that you have a grudge against the old sinner. Now I want you to enter into a plot with me, and I'll give you half of the proceeds. I want to beat this man, so that he will let me alone in the future. If he gets beat, it will do him more good than a sermon. We will start off on beer. I can drink at least five glasses without feeling any effects. Hogan will drink the same, and each of his glasses must be liberally salted with whisky. I will then call for gin, and while you give Hogan the pure article, I'll take a brimming glass of water for mine. Now, what do you say—will you do it?"

"Waal, I'll be blazed if I don't," Callahan replied, in admiration. "You're a sharp young rooster, an' here's w'at'll tip ye the hand, fer true."

The matter was settled, and Jack went to bed until midnight, when it was his turn to go to work again.

He knew this was the only way to beat the king of the oil regions, without incurring his hatred, which he was not desirous of doing.

The next night when he entered the bar-room of the Draper House, he found it crowded with the roughest customers in the town, including the notorious Ben, himself. The news that the meek and quiet Parson was going to drink against the brutal Ben for stakes, had spread like wildfire, and a delegation had come in from every town surrounding to see the sport.

"Hello! here's the Parson!" Hogan exclaimed, triumphantly. "Say, young feller, are you ready to test my storage capacity for beverage? I hain't even smelt o' a bung hole to day, jest on account of waiting to polish you off."

"Haven't got enough money to make the wager two hundred," Jack replied, stepping up to the bar. "Callahan, can you lend me the rhino?"

The barkeeper nodded, and laid a couple of hundred-dollar bills upon the counter, and Hogan instantly covered them with an equal amount, for in those days of ten-dollar oil, money was plenty out among the wilds of northwestern Pennsylvania.

The money deposited, Jack turned and nodded to Callahan:

"Give us two beers, barkeeper. We will start in moderate."

The two beers were drawn and quaffed—then two more, by which time Jack noticed an apparent effect on Hogan.

He was becoming more talkative, and as usual

his language was anything but refined or pleasant to hear.

"Give me straight gin, brimmers," Jack ordered, and when they came, he made but one mouthful of his, while Hogan took his in sips.

The crowd began to see which way the contest was going to end, and cheered the Parson, accordingly. It was beyond their comprehension how a man of Hogan's caliber who was constantly steeped in liquor, could be beaten at his best game by a mere stripling and a teetotaler at that.

But one gin followed another at regular intervals, and at last Ben Hogan the notorious ruffian and pugilist fell to the floor, dead drunk, while Jack coolly pocketed his stakes, and retired to his room for the night.

Not once did a suspicion enter the people's minds of the deception that had been practiced or it might not have been so well for our young speculator.

On the following day he heard that Hogan had sworn to get even, but the fact that the rough had left town gave Jack hope that the threat may have been only an idle boast.

With the hundred dollars he had won, and fifty he had saved out of his wages, he bought three more shares in the well, which was now rapidly approaching completion.

By a change, it was now arranged to have Jack go on duty from six in the evening, until six the following morning, thus bringing him into all of the night work. He acquiesced, however, and worked faithfully as directed.

One night as he was working in the engine-house, and whistling merrily to while away the time, Callahan slipped into the engine-house with a mysterious grin.

"Sh!" he cautioned, in a whisper—"not a word! Hogan and three or four of his gang are outside, with tar and feathers, and propose giving you a dose. I found it out by accident, and propose we give the devils a stame bath."

Seizing a rubber hose that was attached to the boiler, he screwed on a nozzle, and stood ready in front of the door.

"When I yell, 'now!' turn on the steam full heft," he ordered of Jack, who stationed himself at the stop-cock.

Pretty soon the door of the engine-house was flung open, and four roughs attempted to enter, but at the signal from Callahan, Jack turned on the steam, and a scalding torrent was turned upon them.

With howls of pain they staggered back—then beat a hasty retreat, and that was the last effort made to molest Jack.

They had fairly found out that the Parson was able to look out for number one.

A few days later the Ducky-Deer well reached sand, and instantly began to spout at the estimated rate of a thousand barrels a day, the first jet spurring clear over the top of the derrick.

The news spread like wildfire, for this was the biggest strike yet made in the Red Hot territory, and evidenced much future prosperity to the town.

When Jack heard the news, he instantly hired a hand in his place, and jerking off his greasy garments, and on his better ones, he hastened to the scene of excitement, where hundreds had already preceded him.

Anticipating the spouting beforehand, the company had been provided with proper pipeage and tankage, and the casing head was soon capped, and the oil run off into a tank.

The well was then re-christened the Clown, and afterward the Whooper.

Jack had now resolved not to work any more at manual labor, but to return to his chosen profession of speculation, as soon as he should receive his first dividend from the well, in which he had an interest of four-fortieths.

The first twenty-four hours' flow of the well yielded just one thousand barrels of first quality crude oil.

The second day the yield dropped down to five hundred, but as the company had lands to lease in the immediate neighborhood, the fact was suppressed from the public for several days.

In the meantime the well continued along at five hundred barrels a day for some days, when it suddenly became dry, and not another drop of oil could be got out of it, literally speaking.

Part of those holding shares, were in favor of having it torpedoed, while another part objected, and as a result nothing was ever done with it.

Six thousand barrels of oil were sold for sixty thousand dollars, and out of this, Jack realized for his share seven thousand and two hundred dollars.

He was now as rich as he cared to be out of oil, and with his money, he packed his trunk, and left the oil country for Pittsburg, where he stopped a week, and then went on to Cincinnati, where he ran across Bob Beekman of the cat speculation.

Bob was engaged with his father in the grain trade, and doing finely.

Stopping a few weeks in town Jack went next into the interior of Michigan, and bought seven thousand bushels of wheat for \$1.00 per bushel, and sold it, later, to the Beekmans for a figure which realized him a profit of twenty-five cents on each bushel.

So that on the first day of October, a little over a year after he had started out, and after numerous expenditures for clothing, he was the possessor of eight thousand and three hundred dollars.

This he resolved to invest where it would be secure, and then start out anew.

Depositing the eight thousand in the bank, he retained the three hundred, and once more set out, this time to find place to invest his money securely.

It was no serious undertaking.

In the thriving city of Dayton, Ohio, he found four vacant acre lots for sale at one thousand dollars apiece. He instantly purchased them, as they were close to the business center, and out of the four soon had fenced off sixteen fair-sized building lots.

As there were no houses upon them, he rented them to a florist for gardening and horticultural purposes, on consideration of five dollars a month, in addition to which the florist was to pay the taxes upon the property.

Arranging things satisfactorily, Jack then visited many of the towns in Iowa, Indiana, and Illinois, but made no further investment until he came across a circus and menagerie which had encountered bad luck, in Iowa, and was in the sheriff's hands.

Taking an inventory of the stock, he purchased the whole thing for three thousand dollars.

The original cost must have been at least ten times that sum.

There were thirty cages of animals, large and small, a chariot, tent and appurtenances, eighty horses, an elephant, two camels, and fifteen brass-band instruments. All were in good order, and Jack felt satisfied that he had made a first-class investment.

Re-engaging the company, and naming the concern after its former owner, Jack took the managerial helm of a new speculation.

He had read the life of Barnum, and it had attracted him to so great an extent, that he was possessed of a desire to sample still further the sweets of a showman's life.

They visited Dubuque, Muscatine, Davenport and Burlington, Iowa, then branched off into Illinois, doing all the towns of any importance, and meeting with fair success. Not quite satisfied with the receipts, Jack concluded to slap on more paper, and accordingly doubled his previous success by extra billing. About the first of December the show reached New Orleans, where Jack disbanded the company, and engaged winter-quarters for his stock and wagons, having cleared two thousand dollars out of his short traveling season.

It occurred to him, now, that he would like to return to Lowell and spend Christmas with the Bonds, for he had not forgotten pretty, piquant Bessie, by any means, and yearned to see her once more.

During the interval of their separation he had corresponded with her frequently, and it had been a source of pleasure to him to hear from her.

So he packed up his valise, and took the first train for Boston, after which he felt better.

Arrived in Boston, he was not long in steaming on to Lowell, and soon was heartily received by the Bonds, both of whom were evidently glad to see him.

In Lowell he found matters progressing about the same as usual.

He erected a costly and appropriate monument at the head of the graves of his mother and father; and after a week's stay he took his departure.

Stopping off in Boston, he was successful in selling his house and lot for fifteen hundred dollars, which was all they were really worth.

Then taking the cars, he steamed back to New Orleans by slow stages, arriving there the first day of February.

Here he remained idle until the first of March, when he concluded to start out with his circus.

Accordingly he had the show fitted out in good shape, engaged a full three-score of drivers and canvas men, and a company of cheap

performers, who, albeit the fact they worked for low wages, were excellent artists.

One "child" artiste, aged seventeen, whose non-professional name was Lily Thorpe, was Jack's special favorite, for she was a vivacious, intelligent little being, modest and virtuous, and really charming to know. She was all alone in the world, her father, a circus man, having recently died, while her mother had died years before, of yellow fever.

She was of Southern birth, and warm and impulsive of temperament, as most of the Southern women are; then she was next to a marvel upon the trapeze and tight rope, and was equally a good equestrian, dancer, singer and banjoist.

Jack first found her performing in a concert garden, and perceiving that she was a good "card," engaged her for a fair salary for the tenting season.

He afterward learned her value as a modest and charming companion.

Changing his name, Jack secured a full company, and started upon the road by wagon, visiting such towns as had population enough to warrant a fair audience.

Until May he kept among the lower States, where there was no cold weather, but met with indifferent success.

In May, 1875, he rented out his menagerie to another party, and with a few tent-wagons, horses and performers, pulled for Texas and the Far West.

The towns were far apart, and sometimes a day was missed in which no show was given, but when they struck a town it was certain there would be a turnout, for the bordermen are lovers of a fine equestrian display, and a town of two thousand inhabitants was good for a two or three days' stay, the receipts of each day averaging about alike.

The company traveled fully equipped with arms, for they were traveling through a rough and lawless country, and knew not what minute they might be set upon and slaughtered.

During the days of traveling, the ladies and gentlemen of the company would practice at target shooting, and Jack and Lily Thorpe generally came off best.

No trouble was encountered until the circus arrived in Sherman, Texas, which contains more ruffians to the square foot than any other town in the State.

Then a fracas occurred, the results of which the company felt for a long time afterward.

CHAPTER V.

A TRIAL AT CIRCUS BUSINESS.

THE show arrived about the middle of the forenoon, from the previous stand at El Corrale, and conducting the ladies of the troupe to the principal hotel, Jack returned to superintend matters at the tent ground.

He found that although his agent had extensively billed the town and vicinity, the prospects were not large. The people were generally a rougher class than he had yet encountered, and not one ticket had been sold in advance.

Arrived at the tent-grounds, where the men were busy in erecting a canvas of gigantic proportions, Jack found a gang of the town roughs already congregated, headed by one Big Connales, who literally bossed the town. A great overgrown fellow he was, with enormous head and limbs and a great girth—a man with evil face and gleaming bloodshot eyes; with shaggy unkempt hair and stubbly bristling beard; one that no person would care to meet alone in a dark place was the Sherman giant.

He was making a considerable noise, and a deal more of blow, and when he saw Jack, up to him he pranced, with a cut of the pigeon's wing:

"Hello, you young rooster! I s'pect mebbe ye kin tell me whar 'll I find ther manager o' this yere hippomenagerie. Jest wanter encounter 'im I do—wanter see an' interview him on ther sublimest kind o' bizness, an' don't ye fergit it. Mebbe I know him, fer instance—mebbe I do, fer I'm an old sarcus hoss, I am—a spotted leopard, a ring-tailed baboon, an alligator an' a baby elephant combined—ye bet!"

"Well, sir, I am the one you want to see," Jack replied, coolly. "I'm the owner, director, manager, boss, and financial element of this show, and if you want anything of me, spit it out, and be lively about it."

"You ther prime factor o' this sarcus!" the Texan giant gasped, in surprise—"you ther manager o' this show? Waal, now, I'll be gum blasted ef I don't believe ye're right. Ye correspond ter a capital dot wi' ther description ther colonel give me, darned ef ye don't."

"The colonel?" Jack interrogated.

"Yas, ther colonel! Mebbe ye don't know ther colonel, eh?"

"Probably not."

"Waal, I do, an' ther colonel he knows me, and likewise do he knoweth you. An' he sez to me, sez he: Connales, go down to the circus, an' ef thet p'izen imp o' a proprietor don't give ye the courtesies o' ther show, jest go ter work an' tumble his shanty all ter tophet, an' take absolute persession. An' I reckon the old colonel's head war purty level, pilgrim, when he uttered them words, an' I reckon we're ther disciples o' his religion, we be, an' we reckon in konclusion thet we're a-goin' ter take in the sarcus, free gratis, hev a kiss frum ther purtiest gal, and dance wi' ther old clown, or bust up ther show. Thet's ther doctrine preacheth I, Big Connales frum Corpus Christy."

"Karect!" Jack replied, bowing and turning away. He did not say more, for he had not as yet made up his mind which to do—let the giant and his pals in, or run the risk of a fight.

His hands were all first-class men, for he had picked many of them up on the route. They were all to be depended on in a row.

Big Connales hung around the grounds along with his men, and watched the mammoth tent go up with sullen impatience.

The bottle was passed frequently between the gang, and evident it was that they were gradually ripening for a quarrel and a fight.

"Ain't there no officers of the law in the town?" Jackson the tent boss asked of a bystander, when our young manager had told him the situation. "Ain't thar no sheriff, or constable, or police—?"

"Reckon there's a constable, som'eres," the man replied, "ef he ain't on a tear. This be his day fer gittin' staven drunk, ye know."

After the tent was up, Jack assembled the men, and made known to them the condition and prospect of affairs, and invited their judgment—whether it was best to let the giant and his crowd in free, or run the risk of a "fuss."

"Give the cuss a swack in the mouth, if he bothers you, an' we'll stand by ye," said Dick Kerby, one of the leading spirits among the men. "I reckon we allow no Texan galoots ter run this yere carryvan, ef I know it."

And so it was arranged.

The customary parade was given on the streets, but every member of the company was armed, and in readiness to resist any attack.

It was customary for Little Jewel, or Lily Thorpe, to give a tight-rope ascension outside the tent, previous to the show, but Jack wisely cut this performance, for he had noticed during the parade that Big Connales had his evil gaze fixed on the charming artiste—that he was only waiting for a chance to capture or assault her.

The ticket wagon opened at one o'clock, and a few tickets were sold for the afternoon performance, the total receipts not exceeding fifty dollars.

No row occurred, and Jack was hopeful that none would, but was doomed to be disappointed, for it came just after the evening performance had commenced.

On being refused gratis admission to the show, the Texan giant had promptly purchased tickets for himself and companions, and had entered the tent.

Closing the ticket wagon, Jack entered after them, for he now felt sure that the storm was impending.

A moderate audience was assembled beneath the canvas, but were mostly plainmen and settlers, but few women being present.

Jack was glad of this, and sent several ushers to notify those that were present of an impending row, so that they might have an opportunity to leave.

Jack had calculated that the hostile demonstration would come when Little Jewel made her evening's debut.

The instant she came riding out into the ring upon her trained white horse, Big Connales gave a yell, and tossing his hat into the air, leaped toward the ring, followed simultaneously by a dozen of his pals.

With corresponding promptness Jack's full company, tent-hands and all, rushed from the dressing-room, with hand-arms of every conceivable pattern—then the crowd began to pour down from the lofty tiers of seats, firing and yelling as they came.

On which side they were fighting, it was impossible to determine, but their flying bullets did about as much damage to one party as the other. The ruffians and the tent-hands were by this time fighting like furies—the roar of fire-arms, the yells of the fighters and of the wounded, all served to make a literal pandemonium beneath the canvas.

Bravest and most heroic of all stood Lily Thorpe upon her horse, firing right and left with her revolvers, and endeavoring to clear a passage to the dressing-tent.

From a position near the doorway, Jack saw her wave her hand, and understood her message instantly. Running out of the tent, he drew his knife and cut every guy rope, then the center tackle rope, and down came the great spread of canvas with a rush upon the heads of the fighting, struggling mass of humanity.

And that very act was the salvation of perhaps two thirds of those within, for when the canvas came down upon their heads, it attracted the attention of every person to his own safety—every man now sought his own escape, and in this way the battle ceased to wage.

One by one they cut their way out of the smothering prison, until all that were living had made their escape, by which time the canvas-top was literally slit into ribbons.

As soon as they emerged from under the canvas, it began to rain furiously, which Jack considered fortunate, for it drove those who had composed the audience to their own homes and saved any further disturbance.

As soon as he could he collected his men, and they partially raised the tent, so that they could estimate the damage done.

Big Connales and ten of his gang were either dead or upon the point of dying—several of the audience were also killed, and, worst of all, three of the performers and five tent hands were dead, while nearly every one that remained had been more or less seriously injured in the fracas.

Lily Thorpe had received a slight flesh wound, but declared that it did not incapacitate her for duty.

Fully believing, and perhaps correctly, that the townspeople had been fighting against instead of for the show, Jack felt it was not safe to remain longer in the town, and accordingly, selecting ten of his men who were yet able to work, and also applying himself to the task, they began tearing down and pulling up. In two hours the sick and those who had belonged to the company that had met with death, were loaded into a box wagon and driven out upon the prairie, several miles from town, followed by the rest of the wagons with the paraphernalia.

Here a camp was made, and pickets posted for the night.

In the morning the dead were buried, and a general review of matters taken by Jack, who felt pretty dubious.

Only two of his tumblers, and three of his equestrians and specialty performers were fit for service, and the stock of able tent hands was fully sufficient, but on consultation it was decided to sew up the rips in the canvas, and struggle on at moderate stages.

This was done, and three days later they exhibited in a town called Baosco, to \$1,000 receipts.

This was the best done for many days, and Jack was hopeful that when they struck further north business would be better.

Therefore he laid the route up through the Red river country and Indian Territory, into Colorado, which they penetrated, doing nearly every town of any importance in the State.

The second year's anniversary of his struggle for a fortune he celebrated in Denver, by giving the members of his company a banquet at one of the hotels, after the evening's performance.

Jack was now twenty years of age, and probably his experience had been greater than that of any youthful speculator in the United States if not in the world.

On his second year's anniversary he figured up his profits and found that after having paid all expenses, he was the possessor of six thousand dollars, in addition to the seven thousand he had invested in the lots at Dayton, and the circus property.

The result was not quite satisfactory to him. At the rate of seven thousand and five hundred dollars a year, he perceived that it would be impossible for him to make the sum of the mortgages in five years as he had hoped to do.

Either he must give up the hope of so large a realization, or must make money faster than he had been doing. After deliberation he concluded that the former was the wisest policy.

His incessant devotion to business for the last two years had worn upon him, a great deal, and he concluded that after the circus season was ended, he would rest for the winter.

Although only twenty years of age, he looked five years older than that, which fact was probably owing to his having raised a mustache and goatee, that any man of thirty might have been proud to possess.

After leaving Denver, he branched eastward into Kansas, thence into Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

In October he sold out his show to Kirby, one of his employees, for five thousand dollars, and started for the East with twelve thousand dollars in his pocket.

On the way he stopped in Chicago, St. Louis and Cincinnati, and deposited half of the amount in different banks.

With the rest he made for Philadelphia. The approach of the Centennial induced him to tarry there.

In December he met and became acquainted with many prominent citizens of the Quaker city, through business intercourse in Third street, where he occasionally invested shrewdly in stocks and sold them to good advantage.

In this way he managed to defray all of his expenses, without breaking into his larger capital.

As soon as the Centennial had fairly opened, he bought out fifteen huckster carts and outfits, and hired trusty men to drive them, and sell all kinds of truck in the streets.

He then contracted with several Jersey and Maryland truck growers for their full supply of vegetables and green stuff, and also contracted with numerous hotels and boarding houses to furnish them with the same, including butter, eggs and fish.

Thus he established a good business, which, as the great International Exhibition progressed, gradually increased, netting him a handsome profit without his having to expend much time or labor.

To him the Centennial proved a profitable, pleasant and instructive period of his life, as it did to thousands of others.

When not engaged in business, he spent his days within the Exposition poring over the great treasures there to be seen, or dreaming away the hours in the shade of the park, watching the vast crowds that surged to and fro like the white-capped waves far out upon the bosom of the restless ocean.

One evening while attending a representation of "Around the World," at the Alhambra Theater, he saw a face among the many faces in the balcony tier, that looked familiar—a pale, haggard face, in which were set a pair of wild, sunken eyes, that glittered seemingly even more than the spangles upon the costumes of the ballet girls.

In vain did he gaze at the face, but familiar though it looked, he failed to recognize the owner.

The face and the eyes, however, haunted his dreams that night, and he could not forget it.

The next day, as he was leaving the Centennial Art Gallery by the rear entrance, he came suddenly face to face with the same woman, who was accompanied by a well-known Philadelphia detective.

The moment the woman saw Jack, she threw up her arms, and uttered a shrill cry.

"There he is! there he is—my runaway husband. Arrest him, quick, before he gets away," she screamed, excitedly.

And to Jack's consternation and horror, the detective seized him firmly by the arm, and said:

"Young man, it is my duty to arrest you on the charge of willful desertion of your wife. You will have to come with me."

CHAPTER VI.

JACK IN TROUBLE AND OUT—OFF TO THE BLACK HILLS.

Of course Jack was surprised. He could not well be otherwise, since the woman was a stranger to him, and yet claimed him as her husband.

"See here—hold on!" he exclaimed, as the detective was in the act of marching him off. "I don't know this woman—never was married to her—never was married. There is some mistake, here!"

"Oh! I guess not," the detective replied, good-naturedly. "I've known of several such cases, before. If you will be so kind as to accompany me to the outside inclosure, you can hire a carriage down to the Central, if you choose."

"But tell me who is this woman—this accursed impostor?" Jack replied, hotly.

"I am sure that was Lillian Lorne—she whom you secretly married, because you were a beggar, and then deserted."

"It's a confounded lie—a plot to ruin me!" Jack groaned. "Lead on, man!"

The detective and Jack walked side by side out of the Centennial grounds, the woman following close behind.

Outside of the inclosure they entered a car-

riage, and were whirled away into the old city, and to the police court, where Jack was arraigned for wife desertion.

"Let the woman give in her testimony, backed by other testimony," his Honor said. "This complaint of wife desertion is becoming quite too common."

Lillian Lorne was accordingly sworn, and in her testimony, stated that the defendant had secretly married her, in Lowell, two years before, and showed a marriage certificate in the handwriting of Mr. Bond, the Lowell rector.

As further witness, she offered Mr. Thomas Tremaine, of Lowell. Tremaine testified that he had known of the marriage, by being present at its consummation, and recognized Jackson Hoyle as the legally wedded husband of the plaintiff.

"What have you to offer in defense, Mr. Hoyle, in relation to this?" the judge inquired.

"Nothing, further than that the testimony of this precious pair is a square perjury. I demand that you retain them both in custody, and send to Lowell for the testimony of the Reverend Mr. Bond. He will, I am sure, disown the certificate."

"Very well, sir. You are at liberty to go, under five hundred dollar bonds. The other witnesses are bailable at one thousand dollars, each."

Jack deposited the cash as security, and took his departure, while Tom Tremaine and Lillian Lorne were committed, in default of the required bail.

Jack at once telegraphed to Lowell to Mr. Bond, but presently received the answer that the reverend gentleman and his daughter had gone to the Centennial.

Accordingly he again repaired to the Centennial grounds, and in Machinery Hall, near the great Corliss engine, he ran suddenly across the rector and his charming daughter, Bessie.

For Bessie had increased in loveliness—was an exquisitely graceful girl, with fair face and rich hair, and eyes of fascinating magnetism.

That she had lost none of her sweetness of temper was evident by the affection she vouchsafed the rector, who was growing well on in years.

"Ah! my son," he said, grasping Jack by one hand, while Bessie claimed the possession of the other, "we are glad to see you. We were wondering if we should meet you here."

"And I am equally glad to meet you both," Jack replied, joyfully. "I have not sought for many friends and acquaintances, and consequently have not found many. And as I am in need of friends, you are the very ones I want. I want a little news from Lowell."

"Ah! then, despite all your roving, your heart often turns back to your native town, eh?"

"Indeed it does. But the news I now seek is not out of idle curiosity, but is to help me defend myself against an untrue charge."

"Ah! Out with your questions, and those that I can not answer, perhaps Bessie can," the rector said, pleasantly.

"Well, I want to know first of all, if you know what has become of Lillian Lorne and Tom Tremaine?"

"No; we know nothing of them, except that they were said to have eloped together, a short time before Mr. Lorne became bankrupt, which happened a year ago."

"Ah! eloped, eh? What became of Addison Tremaine?"

"He disposed of every thing he had, and fled for the Black Hills, to escape being arrested, by one Harry Hunter, for embezzling your father's property. Hunter, I have learned, went on in pursuit."

"Good! I trust he will work out the reward I offered him. One more question: did you, Mr. Bond, ever marry me to Lillian Lorne, or issue a certificate of such a marriage?"

"Indeed, no! why do you ask such a question?" the rector demanded, in great surprise.

"I will explain," Jack said, and accordingly he related the facts concerning his arrest, and Lillian Lorne's charge.

"It's a base plot between the girl and young Tremaine to extort money from you," the rector said, indignantly. "But, never fear. I will free you, and let them feel the full rigor of justice."

The next day Jack and the rector went before the judge, and matters were satisfactorily arranged, and an order was issued for the re-arrest of Tremaine and Lillian Lorne, who had a short time before been released on bail.

But they could not be found, and it was evident that they had taken a hint in time, and left the city.

The Bonds and Jack were much together during the next month, and "did" the Exposition,

thoroughly, with much mutual pleasure and profit.

The intimacy between sweet Bessie and Jack gradually ripened into love, and when they again parted, the charming little maiden wore an elegant engagement ring, the gift of Jack, who was to come to her and claim her as his bride, at the end of three years more.

The third anniversary of his "banishment from Lowell," as he termed it, he spent in the Centennial grounds, it occurring on memorable Pennsylvania day.

And it was the last day he spent in Pennsylvania, for the next day he started for the Black Hills, having caught the then prevailing fever.

His summer at the Centennial had not turned out so badly, for he had cleared a thousand dollars and expenses out of his huckster speculation.

On his way West he stopped at Dayton, and sold his lots for a slight advance on the price which he had given; he then visited Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis, and withdrew the amounts he had deposited; and when he arrived in Cheyenne, he found himself the possessor of about twenty thousand dollars in cash.

One would not have estimated his wealth as anything great, for he dressed quite plainly, and made no pretensions.

He carried his money in an old sachel, with the exception of what he needed for traveling expenses. This he kept in a little leathern valise.

About this time, the depredations of road-agents between Cheyenne and Deadwood were everyday occurrences, and travelers all went well armed.

But arms seldom availed them, for no stage went through without being stopped by one or more gangs of the knights of the trail, and those who had money always had to "cash up."

Being something of an actor, himself, Jack hit upon a happy expedient, by disguising himself as an old preacher.

Near Red Canyon their stage was promptly halted by the road-agents, and the passengers were commanded to hand over their valuables in the shortest possible order.

Jack immediately dropped upon his knees in the coach, as if to pray, but when nudged with the muzzle of a revolver, he handed over both his valise and the sachel.

"There, most noble sir, is all I have—my money is in the valise, and my shirts and dirty socks in the sachel. Take them in welcome, but spare my life!" he said.

"Who in blazes wants yer dirty socks?" the collector growled, hurling the superannuated sachel back into the coach. "The rhino's what we want, I opine!"

And thus, as Jack had calculated, he fooled them, there being only about fifteen dollars in the valise, while the sachel contained nearly twenty thousand dollars.

Many of the passengers gave up all they had, the sums aggregating over a thousand dollars, and when the road robbers had got all they could they rode off in triumph.

The stage arrived in Deadwood without further molestation, and Jack counted himself lucky that he had got through the mountain traps without losing his 'pile.'

Instead of stopping long in the town, which was full to overflowing with all classes of humanity, he soon adopted another plan.

In his rambles among the neighboring mountains he had stumbled upon the entrance to a singular cave in the side of the mountain, and upon exploring further, he found it to be a sort of honeycomb of subterranean passages, the one main chamber having low, narrow, tunnel-like exits that branched off in different directions.

Jack at once resolved to take up his quarters in the cave, and prospect in the vicinity for gold and game.

He accordingly purchased a pack-mule and "packed" up a number of articles from the mining metropolis, which nestled below in the gulch, four hundred rods or more.

Among other things he procured himself a full hunting outfit, a hound, some camp-stools and cooking utensils, a bed, a pick, shovel, and pan and scales, and a moderate stock of groceries, and found himself prepared for life in the mines.

By the time he got things arranged in the cave to his suiting, it had a home-like and cheerful appearance, and he was satisfied that he could stand it as an abode for awhile, at least, unless the grizzlies should make it too warm for him.

Among the first of his jobs was the one of burying his money, where no one could find it,

as he did not care to carry so large a sum about his person.

To find a secure hiding-place in the great mountain honeycomb was a matter of but small importance, for there were many alcoves and fissures where a searcher would never think of penetrating in quest of treasure.

After arranging all at his new home, Jack went out with his rifle and hound, and rambled daily over the mountains, sometimes bagging some game, and occasionally bringing in a grain of gold which he would wash out from some rivulet.

But as yet he had struck no mine, and had made nothing to pay him for his coming.

In Deadwood he saw little or no chance for investment, and he had about made up his mind to return Eastward, when something occurred to change his mind, and cause him to resolve to remain longer in his quarters.

One night he was visited by a strange dream—strange to him, because he seldom dreamed at all.

In the dream he found himself sleeping as usual in the cavern, when suddenly he became conscious of the presence of somebody, and opened his eyes to find a beautiful Indian girl standing in front of him, holding in her hands a banner, upon which was inscribed in letters of fire, the word "Gold!" The banner she waved several times to and fro; then pointed toward one of the many inter-mountain fissures, and suddenly disappeared as if by dissolving into atmosphere.

This was the dream, or what Jack supposed was a dream, its naturalness and reality causing him to believe sometimes that he had not been asleep at all, but had really seen the vision.

What further caused him to give credence to this belief, was the fact that, when he awoke in the morning, he found foot-tracks upon the dusty floor of the cavern, which were not his own, but were such as might have been made by the pretty moccasined foot of the Indian maiden he fancied he had seen.

At any rate, Jack's interest was fully aroused, and he resolved to remain long enough to ferret out the mystery of the cave.

The next day he spent again in hunting and prospecting, but with poor success.

On his return to the cave, he was a little surprised to find it occupied by a stranger, who was seated before the fire, smoking a pipe, and engaged in roasting a piece of venison, which emitted a savory odor.

A queer-looking customer he was, with a fat squat form, clad in greasy buckskin that had evidently seen much service, and a face that was wrinkled and furrowed, and bristled to the eyes with a stubble of gray beard. The eyes were small and twinkling, and emitted a strange fiery sparkle; the nose was hooked, and the mouth large.

In the belt about his waist he sported six revolvers, an equal number of hunting knives, a lasso, and ammunition, while on the floor at his side lay a long rifle.

He looked up as Jack entered, nodded, and turned his attention to roasting the meat.

"Hello, neighbor!" Jack saluted, not knowing what to make of the situation. "I reckon you're in the wrong pew, ain't you?"

"Waal, I ruther gus not," the man at the fire replied, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, and without looking around.

"But, I rather guess that you are," Jack averred. "I believe I'm the proprietor of this hotel, if I know myself."

"Ye do, eh?" laconically.

"Yes, I do."

"Mebbe you can lick me, then," the intruder observed, wheeling around on the stool, and gazing at Jack with his fiery little eyes.

"I don't know as I made any boast to that effect, sir!"

"Oh! ye didn't, eh? Well, then shet up. When a man ken't lick me in a fair up an' down scrimmage, I allow I assume absolute possession til I git ready ter puckachee. I allow drops in wharever night overtakes me, an' ef I find ther folks sociable, like, I allow mak' 'em feel perfectly ter home; but ef they go fer ter tryin' ter bulldoze me, I generally boot 'em out, an make things howl. I warn't brought up in ther woods ter be skeart out by an owl, young feller—I warn't, an' ef ye approach me kinder gently an' zephyr-like, an' don't go ter perigrinatin' off outer yer ear, I opine I'll sheer w' ye, seein's how ye ain't a bad-lukin' chap; but ef ye want fer ter claim ther boss-ship o' this leetle shebang, I'll allow et will be healthiest fer ye ter seek a more salubrious climate, an' don't ye fergit et, 'ca'se I'm bizness clean to the backbone you bet!"

CHAPTER VII.

JACK'S NEW PARD.

AND having delivered himself of this eccentric speech, the individual turned around toward the fire, again, and began roasting his meat.

At first Jack was provoked, and had a notion to throw the illiterate stranger out—that is, if he was capable of so doing, which was a thing he was not certain about.

But upon more mature deliberation, he concluded that his best policy was not to have any fuss with the chap, whose appearance seemed to indicate that he was ready for a fight at a moment's notice.

This Jack did not care to venture, knowing nothing of the prowess of the stranger, who might be the veriest coward, or a match for any half-dozen ordinary men.

"Well, I expect I'd better take up with what I can get, rather than to go without anything," he said, setting down his traps and approaching the fire. "You are the cheekiest galoot I ever saw, at any rate."

"Cheek? Waal, now, look a-l-yar, young pilgrim, mebbe if you had b'iled around the mines fer nigh about ten years, an' fit fer yer rights at every p'int, ye'd be cheeky too. Ef ye don't believe my philosophy, why jest go and try it. Oh! I've been thru ther mill, and found out that ther world's a lumbag!"

"And all the people in it," Jack replied, with a laugh. "By the way, since we are to be room-mates, give us your handle, and your biz."

"Sartin, young feller. I allow leavemy name—should hev registered, only I couldn't find no book. My handle is Revolver Jake, ef ther old court knows herself, an' then ag'in sum o' ther pilgrims call me Old Firefly, on account o' my lamb-like disposition. As to my biz, that's none o' yer biz, ner anybody else's biz. I allow, though ye can generally find me around, somewhere, when that's a fight goin' on. Now discharge yer cargo."

"Well, my name is Jack Hoyle, and I'm a kind of adventurer, in a modest way. I picked up this cave for a dwelling and found cooking my own grub preferable to the hash they sling out, down in Deadwood."

"Jest my fix, perzactly," the old man chuckled, grimly—"jest my fix perzactly, an' bein's we agree on thet p'int, grab yer knife and help yerself ter this venison, which is ready fer dissection."

Jack readily obeyed, and found that the roasting process had been skillfully accomplished, for the meat was a marvel of sweetness and juiciness.

"I reckon you've been cook before," Jack remarked, admiringly. "You excel a hotel cook in the roasting line."

"Great jim-cracks! I reckon I orter be wuth sumthin', arter all the haunches I've roasted. Say, young feller, d'ye know ther report about this yere cavern?"

"Indeed I do not. I was not aware that any one knew of its existence, except myself, until I found you here."

"Ho! ho! I reckon you ain't ther first pilgrim as has been heer. An' you're ther fust chap as hes stayed ther second night. This yere cave war diskivered about a year ago, by a pard o' mine, an' when we found him hes carcass war gone, but his head sat perched up on yonder rock, a-grinnin' at us like all creation!"

"Murdered!" Jack gasped, glancing around, apprehensively.

"I reckon," Old Firefly replied, munching quietly away at his meat. "Waal, next cum another feller frum ther States, an' he sed as how he wasn't afeard ter stay hyar, but he cum back ter town ther next mornin' minus his scalp, an' we couldn't never git a word out o' him as to how he lost et. Several other pilgrims has bin heer, too, but one night satisfied 'em. They sed they see'd speerits, an' Satan knows what all, an' ye couldn't a-hired 'em ter cum back hyar, ef ye was ter give 'em a good layout in pure nuggets."

"Pshaw! I've never seen anything that looked worse than you or I, and we ain't to be feared," Jack replied, laughing.

"Those fellers war arrant cowards, or else they lied, then," the scout muttered. "Down ter Deadwood ther cacklery you must hev heaps o' grit ter continny livin' hyar."

"Well, if I have grit, I haven't manifested it, yet, for I have not been haunted by spirits of any kind. The only thing that has puzzled me since I have been here, is the dream I had last night, in which I thought that a young Indian girl came and stood before me, and held a banner for me to look at on which was printed the word, 'Gold.' After I awoke I found small foot-

prints, and it appeared to me that there had been some one in the cave while I was asleep, at least."

Old Firefly nodded his head.

"Yes! yes!" he muttered, shrugging his shoulders—"yes! yes! my lad. Twixt you an' me there's a good many things about ther caves thet ar' mighty strange. An' I opine you an' I ar' ther very condemned couple ter tackle ther case, an' investgate tuer mystery. What do you say, now?"

"I'm agreed. Anything honest, for money or adventure, suits me, a capital dot," Jack replied. "I'll go in halves with ye in all the fortunes we find."

"All right. I'm goin' ter turn in fer ther night, an' you can foller suit, when ye git ready," and Old Firefly alias Revolver Jake, rolled himself up in a blanket, near the fire, and his loud breathing soon proclaimed him to be asleep. Then Jack went out through the cavern entrance for a breath of pure air, for that within the rocky chamber was thick and damp.

Outside the air was clear and sweet, for it was now in the latter part of October, and the cold weather was rapidly drawing on in the northern regions.

The night was a beautiful one; the sky was cloudless, and the moon and stars shone with dazzling brightness, casting a whitish illumination over the landscape.

Far below lay the little mining metropolis of Deadwood, basking in the moon's dreamy radiance; the shops, saloons and dance-houses were still open and strains of music and revelry came floating up the mountain side. People were swarming in the long main street, and hurrying to and fro, their shouts and halloas faintly audible to the young hermit.

"I wonder why it is that I feel nervous, to-night?" he thought, pacing to and fro along a little ledge that ran in front of the cavern entrance. "Something warns me of impending danger, though I know not what. Perhaps I am sheltering a foe, in there, but he seems all right, and I cannot quite believe that he is a fraud. Ah! what was that?"

A footstep—a stealthy one, too.

Stepping back into a shadow, he gazed keenly around him, and soon made out a figure descending the mountain side, a short distance below where he was standing—the trim figure of a young maiden, clad in a picturesque costume of fringed, tanned buckskin, consisting of a short skirt and waist, leggings and mantle, and a jaunty pink silk cap.

Her face he could not see, but he involuntarily pronounced it a handsome one, from the fact that her form was graceful.

"I wonder who it is, and what she was doing up here," he muttered, as he gazed after her. "Perhaps she is the same one that visited me in my dreams."

He returned to the cavern and threw himself upon the straw mattress that composed his bed.

Old Firefly was snoring loudly, and feeling at ease so far as he was concerned, Jack soon dropped off into a sound, refreshing sleep.

When he awoke, it was with a slight start.

Somebody was moving about the cavern, in a cautious manner, and that somebody he soon made out to be Old Firefly.

Lying perfectly quiet, Jack watched him narrowly, with a great anxiety to know what he was about.

The old man was equipped with a lighted torch, and appeared to be exploring the cavern in every part, using the greatest care in his movements, as if afraid of arousing a sound.

First one crevice in the rocky wall he peered into, and then another, as if in search of something, which he did not appear to find, as he occasionally gave vent to a grunt of dissatisfaction.

Jack had but little doubt now, but what the old chap had in some way learned of his moneyed possession, and was making a search for the place where he had hidden it.

At first he was tempted to shoot him on the spot, but on further thought he resolved to let him go ahead, and if he found it, it would be time enough, then. In the meantime he would watch him, and hold himself in readiness for the emergency.

For more than an hour did Old Firefly continue the search, and then, apparently disgusted he thrust the torch into the fire, and prepared to again roll himself in his blanket.

"What was you hunting for, so long?" Jack asked, rising up on his elbow.

The old man started visibly, and turned square around as he heard the voice.

"You awake?" he grunted. "Why didn't you get up and help me?"

"Why didn't you tell me to?" Jack replied, with a yawn. "I was wondering what in the deuce you were up to."

"Hunting for the durned Injun gal, of course. I'll bet five dollars she won't escape next time, if I get a bead drawn on her."

"You had a dream, eh?"

"Nary a time. I see'd the critter wi' my eyes socked clean open."

"What did she look like?"

"You described her karect. She loked like an Indian princess, an' I reckon thar wern't no doubt about her bein' cl'ar Injun."

"Did she come in here?"

"Yas—she waltzed right in wi'out sayin' nothin' ter nobody, an' when I made a lunge at her, she slid off like chain-lightnin' on a greased track."

"Strange! I should like to capture this nocturnal visitant," Jack said, as he turned over in his blanket, and made pretense of going to sleep.

But no sleep visited his eyes again that night, for his suspicions were aroused against the old man, whoever he might be. Certain was Jack that he had not been searching for any Indian girl, at all, but instead, he had been searching for the secreted money, and resolved was Jack to watch him sharply, and shoot him if he found him guilty of the suspected treachery.

On the following morning Old Firefly was grim and uncommunicative, and after the morning meal announced his intention of going for a hunt.

Jack concluded not to accompany him, but resolved to remain and thoroughly explore the many intricate passages leading off from the main cavern into the bowels of the mountains.

After Old Firefly had gone, he armed himself, and went out upon the mountain for pine fagots for torches. Securing several suitable for the purpose he returned to the cavern, and during the day explored several of the passages, with the result of finding that they all ended abruptly in the bowels of the mountains.

When night drew on, finding that Old Firefly had not returned, he resolved to descend the mountain to Deadwood to make a few purchases.

So he clambered down to the gulch bottom, and mingled with the restless crowd that surged in the long main street.

During the evening he dropped into the Monitor gambling saloon, to watch the games, for, although he had not played a game in the last three years, he was fond of watching others who did play.

The saloon was moderately filled with all classes and ages of men, from the bloated capitalist, to the veriest ruffian and bullwhacker, and from the beardless boy to the white-haired septuagenarian—men of rough and men of polished appearance—men who were scrupulous and men who were unscrupulous—a strange heterogeneous mass to be seen in no other town on the face of the globe.

Men were here who gambled as a profession, and fleeced right and left, while others were there who only played occasionally, and then played a "square" game—it may be said, to their cost, for they rarely, if ever, won.

On entering the room, Jack's attention was attracted to an old white-haired man, who walked upon crutches, and whose beard reached to his eyes. He was well-dressed, and appeared to be a person who had spent a life of ease, for what of his face could be seen was not wrinkled, but was smooth and fresh. He was accompanied by another man, with an equal amount of beard of a brown hue, and his dress also indicated a man of wealth.

Both men drank often at the bar, and were the observed of all observers.

Unknown to Jack these men both eyed him narrowly, and exchanged words in a low tone concerning him.

While Jack was watching a game of poker, the old man hobbled in front of him, and also appeared to be an interested watcher.

In the meantime Jack was unaware that in a momentary crowd in his rear, the man with the brown whiskers passed behind him, and slipped something into the capacious pockets of the blouse he wore.

Perhaps nobody in the room noticed the act, nor would it have been known had it not been a link in a plot, of which Jack Hoyle was to be the victim.

The old man suddenly appeared to grow excited, and thrusting his hand toward his hip pocket, he cried:

"I'll bet a thousand dollars—"

Then suddenly he looked surprised, and began to look upon the floor.

"By Heaven! I have been robbed!" he ejaculated, wildly—"I have been robbed of fifty dollars which I had in my hip pocket!"

Instant excitement ensued, and according to the rules of the establishment the doors were promptly closed and locked, to prevent the culprit from escaping.

"I had the money there but a moment ago!" the old man declared, "and some person immediately in my rear must have stolen it."

"Here's a chap that stood suspiciously close to you," the brown-whiskered man said, pointing to Jack, "and if I mistake not he's the same chap we saw arrested down in Cheyenne for picking pockets. It won't be any harm to search him, anyhow. Gentlemen, will some of you assist me?"

And the speaker stepped forward toward Jack, a sinister gleam in his dark eyes.

In that same second Jack recognized the man.

CHAPTER VIII.

WOLVES SHOW THEIR FANGS.

Yes, recognized him, beneath all his bewhiskered disguise, as Tom Tremaine.

"Step back!" he cried, attempting to draw a revolver; but in this he was foiled, for a dozen pair of hands seized him, and held him as in the grip of a vise, and Tremaine made a hasty examination of his pockets.

"I told you!" he exclaimed, a moment later, as he had held up two rolls of bills which he himself slipped into Jack's blouse pockets. "Here's the money, just as the culprit stole it."

"You lie!" Jack cried, hotly. "I did not steal the money, nor did I put it in my pockets. Somebody has played me an infernal trick."

"Ah! that won't work, my friend," the sheriff of the town replied. "Ef ye warn't caught with the stuff on ye, it would be o' some use to talk, but as it is, I opine you're in a fair way to stretch hemp!"

"Yes! yes! hang him, the rascal!" the old gray-beard cried, savagely. "Hang him at once, and I'll pay the damage."

"So will I," Tom Tremaine declared, eagerly.

"Make an example of the chap by instituting a first class lynch pic-nic."

"Sorry ter say we can't obleege ye, gents," the sheriff replied. "Thet ain't my style o' doin' bizness, ye see. The galoot's got ter hev a trial, afore we can boost 'im."

"Then, I subpoena every man in the room as witness that the pickpocket was caught with my money in his possession!" the man of the gray beard cried.

"Oh! there will be no trouble of making a clear case of it," Tom Tremaine declared, exultingly. "Say, sheriff, when shall we have the pleasure of witnessing his antics in the air?"

"When he is convicted," the sheriff replied, tartly. "The trial will take place to-morrow."

"Eh! d'ye hear, you light-fingered monkey?" the younger man cried, dancing up to Jack, and shaking his fist close to his nose—"do you understand that you've picked your last pocket?"

"You have played your cards well, Tom Tremaine!" Jack retorted, coolly, "but you won't win, nevertheless. Villainy may prosper for a time, but not always. If ever I get loose, you shall have a chance to test the strength of my arm."

"But you won't get loose, and consequently I don't stand in the least fear of you! Off with him, sheriff, to the jail."

The officer obeyed, by handcuffing Jack, and marching him out of the saloon.

Down the main street they went, followed by a portion of the crowd who could not resist the temptation of escorting the prisoner to the jail.

The sheriff, whose name was Mackintosh, showed Jack to a strong cell, and removed the handcuffs from his wrists.

"No use o' your wearin' cuffs when ye ain't out in society," he said, with a grim chuckle. "I reckon ye can't dig out o' ther coop."

"Nor shall I try," Jack replied. "See here sheriff, give me your candid opinion in this matter. Can they hang a fellow on suspicion?"

"Waal, I reckon they do, sometimes."

"And you think they will hang me on what evidence they have got?"

"I opine thet will be ther ultimatum result. Ye see, these Deadwoodites ain't got no particler luv fer a pickpocket or a hoss-thief!"

"But I am not a pickpocket. An infernal trick has been played upon me by this man Tremaine, who is my enemy of old. It was he, no doubt, who slipped the money into my pocket, in order to secure my arrest, and thereby satisfy his appetite for revenge."

"Mebbe ye're right, if so be you're honest."

But et would be hard to prove sech a thing, an' ef ye git a chance to scoot, take my advice and slide out."

And with this comforting advice, the sheriff of Deadwood's magic city slid out himself, leaving Jack to the solitude of his rude and cheerless prison cell, which was gloomy and dismal.

His situation was anything but pleasing, and the prospect thereof anything but inviting.

He realized that he was in a tight place, and that he was in the hands of foes who would be unrelenting.

That the companion of Tom Tremaine was his father, in disguise, Jack had no doubt, and he knew that the two coupled together were as strong a pair of arrant knaves as ever lived.

That he would stand but little show at the coming trial was only too evident, and conviction, in this rough city of the Black Hills, meant death.

Through all the long night he sat and pondered over his situation, and endeavored to conceive a way out of his dilemma, but utterly failed, and at last sunk into a troubled slumber, from which he did not awake until nearly noon.

Mackintosh brought him in some crackers and a mug of beer, at noon, and then retired, without speaking.

Shortly after dinner hour, Tom Tremaine and the gray-haired personage of the cratches, were admitted to the cell, the sheriff locking them in and retiring.

Jack was lying stretched out upon his cot, but made no motion to rise.

"You seem to be taking matters coolly enough," Tom Tremaine growled, evidently disappointed not to find him agitated. "One would naturally suppose you would be engaged in prayer."

"I pray when I desire—not at the option of others," Jack replied. "What brings you and your evil father here, Tom Tremaine?"

"My father?" the younger man said, as if surprised.

"Yes, your father—that old son of a sea-cook behind you, with the false hair and whiskers—the runaway bank robber, whom Harry Hunter wants to see. Oh! it's no use to feign surprise, or to attempt to deceive me."

"Well, then, if you already know us, we shall need no introduction," the Lowell ex-broker said, removing the long false white beard from his face, and smiling darkly. "You must have a keen perception to have penetrated so clever a disguise."

"I recognized your blockhead of a son, here, and so guessed at your identity," Jack answered.

"Well, laying aside jokes, we've got you in a nice fix, haven't we, now?"

"Very likely. I'll give you credit for your skill in villainy."

"Which we proudly accept, my dear Hoyle. You always were profuse with your compliments. By the way, how do you like the idea of trying on Judge Lynch's new style of Piccadilly collars, warranted to fit any neck?"

"I am not afraid to hang," Jack replied with coolness, resolved not to betray any sign of anxiety or fear in their presence.

"You will change your mind, when your wind begins to fail."

"Not in the least; and when I get to the end of my journey, I shall telephone down to you how I like my situation."

"Bah! talk is easy," Tremaine said. "We know that you desire to live, and therefore we propose to make terms with you."

"Make terms?" Jack echoed.

"Ay, make terms. You have money, and can well afford to purchase your liberty. In consideration of the twenty thousand dollars you have somewhere hidden away, we will withdraw our charge, and give you your liberty!"

"Indeed! Will you really do all this?"

"Yes, upon our honor as gentlemen."

"How very accommodating you are!" Jack said, with biting sarcasm. "I marvel that you can stand up under so magnanimous an offer. My great respect for you, however, prevents me taking advantage of your generosity."

"Then, you refuse?"

"Most emphatically!"

"Then give us ten thousand."

"I am sorry to decline."

"You certainly will give five, then, rather than to hang."

"I certainly will not!"

"You are foolish. How much will you give? Your life is certainly worth something to you."

"I will not give you one cent, nor a fraction of a cent. If you came here with a view to make money out of me, you will find yourselves sadly at fault. Rather than let you triumph

over me in this manner, I would die a thousand deaths!"

The two Tremaines looked at each other. Plain it was that Jack had balked their little game.

"Well, if you will be so stubborn, we can not help you, and you must die the ignominious death of a thief. I am sorry, for your father was my dearest friend. Perhaps, if I stay the proceedings, you will yet conclude to come down, liberally."

"Don't entertain so vain a hope, I beg of you," Jack exclaimed, "for you will surely be disappointed."

"Curse you! You talk brave now, but you will change your tune when the halter is placed around your neck!" Tom Tremaine sneered. "Come, daddy, there's no use arguing with a stubborn mule."

"No more there is, but the mule shall die, and we will get possession of his money besides!" the elder villain growled as he followed his son from the cell, which Mackintosh had come to unlock.

After they had gone, Jack rolled over on his couch, and reviewed the situation.

"Perhaps I was foolish not to make terms with them," he mused, "but my grit wouldn't allow it. Curse them! Even though they destroy me they shall not triumph in the possession of my money."

In the meantime the day passed, and the night came on, apace.

When at last it grew dark, Jack's wonder increased, for, as yet, no sheriff had appeared to lead him out to the scaffold, which was to be a part of the programme.

What was the cause of the delay, he could not imagine, unless, as they had proposed, the Tremaines had stayed the proceedings, in expectation that at the last moment Jack would come to their terms.

About ten o'clock in the evening he heard the outer door of the jail softly close, and presently the door of his cell as softly opened to admit some person whom he could not see, on account of the darkness.

In a moment, however, a bull's-eye lantern supplied sufficient light for him to see who his visitor was, and his astonishment knew no bounds when he beheld standing before him the vision of his dream.

Yes—the same trim-formed Indian maiden, clad in a semi-male suit of buckskin, consisting of a handsomely-tanned, fringed hunting-shirt, belted at the waist, and reaching nearly to the knees; leggings of the same material, and top-boots of a light material of leather upon her dainty little feet.

A slouch hat of white felt was worn upon her head, the hair of which was the color of the raven's wing, and fell in profusion over her shoulders.

Her features were well-chiseled, with eyes of jetty black, a mouth of firm yet pleasant expression, teeth of pearly whiteness, and a complexion of nut brown.

Taken as a whole she was remarkably pretty, her features being round and classical, rather than flat, like the usual features of the Indian race.

Jack's surprise was so great that he could not speak, but this was not the case with the girl.

"The Americano is surprised," she said, interpreting his silence. "Let him not fear, for I am Wild Flower, of the Sioux nation, and at peace with the pale-faces. The pale-face miners call me Wild Jo; the prisoner may do the same, for there's nothing in a name."

"Evidently not, out in this wild region," Jack confessed. "What can I do for you, miss?"

"Nothing. It is I who have come to do for you. I come from my father, who is the king of the mountains, and I come to offer you a release, and a chance to make money. Will the pale-face prisoner come to the Locked Valley, with Jo?"

"To the Locked Valley?"

"Ay—to the home of the king of the mountains, who wants to see you. He is getting old, and no longer can see to read or write, and when Jo told him of the pale-face hermit, he was pleased, and said, 'Bring him hither, and Onoboko will make him a great man.'"

Jack gave vent to a little whistle of astonishment.

Here was something that savored of the fairy tale, and he was in the presence of a being apparently from unknown realms.

What to make of it, he did not know. If he should agree to follow this Indian girl, might he not be venturing literally out of the frying-pan into the fire? At any rate, his chances of escaping death could not be any worse, among the Indians.

"Where do you live, and how many are there

in your family?" he asked, determined to know all he could, first.

"Onoboko and Jo are alone of one family, but they have many servants, and live in much grandeur. Will the pale-face come? After he has visited the mountain king, and received much gold, he can return to his people, if he does not like it in the Locked Valley. Will he go with Wild Flower to her home?"

"Yes, I will go, provided I can get out of my present quarters."

"Then, let the pale-face remain here until an hour before daybreak, when the night is the darkest; then Jo will come for him," the Indian girl said, and, turning, she left the cell, locking the door behind her.

Jack listened until he heard her leave the jail, then he threw himself back upon his cot, resolved to catch a few hours of sleep.

He had not slept long, however, when he was aroused to find the cell filled with brawny, be-whiskered men, who wore long black cloaks, and masks upon their faces—men who were armed to their teeth, and as fierce-looking as proverbial brigands.

"Come, young feller, git up and dust yerself," the leader said, handing Jack his hat. "Keep yer mouth shut, too, if you don't want your throttle shut off."

"Who are you, and what do you want?" Jack demanded, surprised at the strange aspect of affairs.

"Well, I reckon we're what they call road-agents, up in this kentry, an' I, Capt'n Pete Porkypine, am ther prime factor. We want yer go 'long w' us on a visit, up ter our leetle stronghold, ef ye ain't got no objections!"

CHAPTER IX.

JACK SHOWS HIS HAND.

"WELL, I suppose there isn't any carthly use of refusing, when you hold the biggest hand," Jack replied. "I want you to answer me one question, however: have the Tremaines anything to do with this abduction?"

"Ask me no questions, young feller, and I'll tell ye no lies," the captain suggested, with a chuckle, which convinced Jack that he had not guessed far from the truth.

Jack's arms and wrists were now bound; then he was led from the jail and placed upon a horse, a number of which were standing near by in the charge of another road-agent.

The remainder of the outlaws then mounted and filed slowly up through the quiet main street, which was deserted at this hour of the night. The horses feet were muffled; nevertheless the road-agents held their rifles in readiness to repel an attack, should one come.

It did not come, however, and they rode safely out of town with their prisoner.

Jack was not blindfolded; consequently he took good care to notice all the points of the route they traversed.

After leaving the town the road-agents rode up Whitewood gulch to its intersection with Nugget gulch, which they entered, and followed for many miles, until it ended abruptly in the face of a huge mountain.

A tunnel-mouthed entrance to a mine had been worked into the base of the mountain, and Jack concluded they had about reached their destination, but found that he was mistaken, when they began to work their way around the base of the mountain through a rugged and narrow path.

Until daylight they continued around the mountain, when they at last arrived in a continuation of the valley, which was timbered with a scattered collection of dead hemlocks, and contained a large pond of stagnant, slimy water.

Near the edge of that pond was a yard of considerable extent, fenced with long slabs which had been split by hand and set up perpendicularly.

Inside this inclosure were a large number of little shanties, sheds and pens, some of the latter evidently containing wild animals, judging by the sounds.

Riding inside the inclosure, the road-agents dismounted, and assisted Jack to follow their example.

"Ye kin foller me, young feller," the captain said, leading the way toward the largest cabin of the lot. "Thar's no use fer ter try to escape, fer I've a pair o' bloodhounds who'd hunt ye up, an' dissect yer carcass in a jiffy."

Believing it policy to obey, Jack followed the captain into his stronghold, which was rudely furnished, and had anything but a cheerful appearance; nor did he start when he saw Tom Tremaine and his father seated at a table, engaged in a game of draw poker. He had been well satisfied from the moment he left the jail,

that they were the cause of his abduction, and that he should meet them at the stronghold, if at all.

"Hello! Who told you to come here?" the younger Tremaine cried, scowling, as if he had not expected such a thing. "I thought you were in jail over in Deadwood."

"You are a liar—you didn't think anything of the kind!" Jack retorted, coolly.

"What! You call me a liar?" the young villain cried, rising to his feet in a sudden passion. "You look out, curse you, or I'll crack you one in the face!"

"You dare not release my hands, and then try it!" Jack returned, defiantly. "I'll double-dare you to."

"Hurrah! that's bizness," the captain cried, excitedly. "Let's have some fun, to pass away the time. Say, you young Tremaine cuss, if I'll cut the feller's bonds, durst you waltz up and slap him in the chops?"

"Of course I dare but I ain't a prize-fighter, and shan't make an exhibition of myself."

"The devil! Ye ain't a-goin' to crawfish, jest fer a little thing like that?"

"I ain't well enough to fight," Tom protested, anxious in some way to crawl out.

"You're plenty well enough, only you hain't got the courage," Jack suggested, sarcastically.

"I doubt if you have courage enough to come and strike me, bound as I am."

"Ha! ha! On course he ain't!" the road-agent cried, dancing around. "Go at him, young lemons, or I'll kick you out o' camp. I won't have no shysters around hayr."

"I ain't a shyster, nor am I going to fight. My arm's lame," Tom still protested, looking sheepish and guilty enough.

"Come! come! Tom; what are you afraid of, you booby?" his father exclaimed, in assumed anger. "Step up and knock the whelp down, and end the matter. You are surely not afraid of him?"

"If you ain't afraid, maybe you'd better step up and face the music, and give your son an 'example'" Jack said, coolly. "I'd just as lief polish you off as your son."

"Afraid of you? Certainly not!" the ex-broker exclaimed, haughtily. "Were it not for toiling my hands on you, I'd teach you a lesson."

"There! you see the style of timber they're made of!" Jack said, turning triumphantly to the road-agent. "If I had as cowardly a dog as they are men, I'd shoot him at once."

"That's bizness, an' I admire yer grit, young pilgrim," the road-agent confessed. "I wouldn't own 'em, after this. But, bizness is bizness, an' I ain't goin' to have no sheenannigan in my camp. I'm goin' ter cut yer hands loose, an' both o' them galoots has got ter get up an' wack ye one, or it's them instead o' you as will go inter ther anamile pit, an' don't ye fergit et."

And with a sweep of his knife he freed Jack of his bonds.

"There, now; I'm ready for you—come and see me," invited Jack, turning to the Tremaines. "I am confident that I can make it extremely interesting to you, one at a time."

"Yas, go ahead and show yer pedigree, or I'll make it a bad job fer you," the captain warned. "Yo struck the wrong camper play crawfishin, I allow. Walk up, old 'man, and let yer j'int's play. It's all easy enough, when ye cum to know how."

"You'll have to excuse me, really, for I never boxed or dealt any one a blow, in my life, and he would surely get the upper hands of me," Addison Tremaine protested, white as a sheet, at the prospect.

"Can't help that!" the captain demurred, with a chuckle, as he drew and cocked a revolver. "Ye can't learn any younger; so get up an' go at it, or I'll sock a chunk of lead right through your pulsometer, sure's I'm a live sinner. In the meantime, you Junior Crawfish, you'd better be sparring with some imaginary galoot, in order to git yer j'int's limbered up, fer I callylate ther rooster frum Deadwood can jest about make two mouthfuls of you. Git out, old man, and face ther music, if you don't want me to salt ye. An' mind, ye ain't to use no weepsons 'cept those the A'mighty originally adarned ye with."

Addison Tremaine arose from the table, and approached the young speculator. He knew that he had but two choices—to face the music, or get "salivated," as the road-agent captain had promised. Of the two evils he chose the least, for he hoped he could defend himself before Jack.

That young personage now stood with his arms folded across his breast, a cool, cynical smile upon his handsome features.

Not a move did he make, until Tremaine

made a lunge forward, and endeavored to slap him in the face; then his arms unfolded with lightning-like celerity, and one knotted fist came in contact with the ex-broker's nose, while the other dealt him a blow in the stomach that doubled him up like a jack-knife, and sent him howling around the room.

"Hurra! hi! hi! hurra!" the road-agent chief yelled in delight. "That's ther bony-fide way to tork it. That's ther way ter give a pilgrim an appetite ter his rations, I tell ye! Cum ag'in, old man, an' git another chunk o' ther same article!"

"No! I've got enough! Curse the whelp—kill him—shoot him! he's ruined my nose and my stomach forever!" the ex-broker howled, dropping into a chair, and groaning and rocking like a wounded lunatic.

"Not much we don't shute that race-hoss, yet awhile," the captain declared. "Hayr's another pilgrim ter initiate inter ther new order of knockemstiffs. Step out here, young Crawfish, and don't be all day about it, nuther, ef ye don't want an ounce o' cold lead socked inter yer system."

Tom Tremaine obeyed, his form trembling, and his face as white as a sheet.

One or two faint passes did he make; then Jack's fist caught him right between the eyes, and down he went to the floor with a crash.

"That's the checker!" the road-agent said, admiringly; "ye did yer part nobly, my boy, an' when ye'll be so kind as to tell me whar your money is concealed, so that I can appropriate it to my own use, you'll be set at liberty, immedietly!"

"When I tell where my money is concealed, may I be kicked to death by mules?" was Jack's defiant response.

"What! do you propose to be obstinate?"

"You'll probably learn that, are you have won!"

"But, I'll bet I can fetch ye ter terms!"

"I'll bet an equal amount that my oath holds good; I swore not to give up the secret of the hiding-place of my gold!"

"Bah! talk is cheap, an' when we cum ter apply a leetle torture, ye'll find how quick ye'll change yer mind, my lark!"

"Never! You may shoot me, roast me by inches, hang me, boil me, skin me down, scalp me or freeze, but you will never learn from me that which you wish to know."

"But we'll do even worse than that. I've a pen of hungry bears, wolves and bloodhounds, out here, and into that you shall be thrown, unless you tell me where you have hid yer money."

Jack shuddered; he could not well do less, at the prospect; but he was resolved that he would die ere he would surrender a penny to his enemies.

"You can go into the next room and stay, if you don't like our company," the road-agent continued, pointing to a door opening into an inner apartment. "You'll find cheers there, and terbaccer. I shell cum fer an anser ter-night."

Jack accordingly entered the room, and closed the door behind him, preferring his own company to that of his ruffian captors.

The room was a small one, furnished with chairs and table, and a rude cot-bed made up of leaves stuffed between a ticking of panther skins. There was but one small window, and this was guarded by heavy bars of iron.

No earthly chance was there to get out except by the door he had closed behind him, without the aid of proper tools.

On reviewing his situation, Jack heartily wished himself back in the East, and resolved to make for it, as soon as he could escape, if he was lucky enough to get out with his life. Enough of rough life had he had.

The day passed slowly.

Out in the adjoining room, loud voices and the clinking of glasses proclaimed that the inmates of the cabin were having a "high old" spree.

As night approached the sounds of revelry began gradually to cease, and finally died out altogether.

On listening at the door Jack could hear no sounds at all, which for a time puzzled him.

What was the cause of the strange silence?

Had they all quitted the cabin, or were they all so intoxicated that they had fallen asleep?

After some deliberation, he resolved to learn the truth; so, opening the door he peered into the adjoining room.

A scene of confusion was presented. Bottles and glasses lay strewn upon the floor—the furniture was upset and scattered about—the two Tremaines and the captain lay sprawled upon the slabs, dead drunk.

Gluttons by nature, they had drank and crouched until wholly overcome.

"As I thought," Jack muttered, elated at the discovery. "A chance is now open for escape, and I am an idiot if I do not grasp it. By assuming the disguise of Tom Tremaine, I can make good my escape—or, can try, at least."

Spurning the ex-broker's son with his foot, he found that he was too far gone to recover immediately; accordingly Jack stripped him of his garments, and donned them over his own, after which he appropriated and donned the young villain's false beard and wig, and also his hat.

Properly arming himself out of a collection of weapons he found on the walls and in the belts, he then left the cabin.

Outside he met several men lounging in the inclosure, but they paid him no particular notice, more than to nod, which proved to Jack that the Tremaines were not strangers in the stronghold.

Going to the corral he ordered the hostler to bridle and saddle his horse, and the old outlaw obeyed by fitting out a handsome mare, who looked as if she might be capable of good speed.

"Goin' fur?" he queried, as Jack climbed into the saddle.

"Yes, to Deadwood," was Jack's reply.

"Ain't agoin' ter ride around ther mountain, aire ye?"

"As far as I can, and then lead the horse till I reach the other valley."

"Comin' back ter see ther send-off?"

"Of course," and then putting spurs to his new animal, he dashed out of the inclosure, and away around the base of the mountain as fast as he could, leaving the stronghold rapidly behind him.

But he had not gained a mile vantage-ground, when the deep bay of a bloodhound broke upon his hearing, and he knew that he was pursued!

CHAPTER X.

A RACE FOR LIFE—THE GOLDEN GULCH.

IT WAS to be a race for life or death!

Jack fully realized this, and urged the little mare on at the top of her speed, resolving that he would race and fight to the last.

He luckily had three revolvers with him, and a repeating rifle of the unapproachable Winchester pattern, besides a sufficient quantity of cartridges which he had found in the cabin. With these, even if his horse failed, he calculated he could ward off the grim monster, for a time, at least.

The route was rough and rocky; great boulders, clumps of shrubbery, and yawning seams and gullies obstructed the way, but the mare cleared them all, in flying leaps, although each moment she threatened to stumble and break her legs, if not her neck.

"On, Beauty—on!" Jack cried, patting her, as they dashed along. "At this rate we bid fair to outwit the devils, yet, for I doubt if another horse can follow where you lead!"

The bay of one or more bloodhounds constantly grew louder, however, and nearer, and there could be but little doubt that they were rapidly gaining. Loud voices, too, were audible, in the distance, which proclaimed that the outlaws were following in the wake of the hounds.

"Hang them!" Jack muttered. "I wonder how they ever discovered my escape! I imagine the old hostler smelt a rat, for he looked at me sharply. He probably went at once to the cabin, after I left, and discovered the state of affairs."

On—on went the little mare, faithfully, as if aware of the danger that menaced her rider, and resolved to carry him out if within her power. On—on, with flying leaps where no other animal would have attempted leaping—on, on, at the very top of her speed.

At last they descended a sharp pitch, and Nugget gulch lay stretching out before them—Deadwood ten miles in the distance.

But, the hounds' deep bays now sounded with startling distinctness, and looking around, Jack saw a pair of them leaping down the mountain trail in hot pursuit.

It was a moment fraught with great peril. In a minute more they would be upon him: he must stop where he was and kill them, or he could never hope to reach a place of safety.

A single "Whoa!" served to check the horse, showing that she had been well broken.

Then Jack's rifle flew to his shoulder, and he sighted for the nearest hound, which was not more than two hundred yards distant.

Taking quick aim, he fired!

With a yelp the foremost brute keeled over on the ground, and after a few struggles, was dead.

"Good enough! If I shall be so lucky as to tumble over the other, I'll at once set myself up as a candidate for Creedmoor," Jack said, with a chuckle. "Then the outlaws can howl and tear their hair as much as they please, for the little mare can crawl right away from them."

Bang! again Jack's rifle cracked sharply, and down went the remaining bloodhound on a run!

Then giving the mare the spurs again, the young adventurer dashed away down the gulch as fast as the little mare could go, which was not slow.

Away! away! he flew, and was just beginning to count himself out of danger, when that grim foe once more suddenly loomed up in his path.

A horseman rode out of a clump of bushes, drew rein, and leveled a rifle full at Jack.

Jack saw the act, and ducked his head, just in time to escape being perforated by the new enemy's bullet, which sung close to his ear.

Quickly raising his own rifle, he took aim and fired, but the bullet did not take effect, evidently, for the horseman sat grimly in his saddle, and fired with a revolver, the shot taking effect in the fleshy part of Jack's right leg, making a slight scratch.

Stung to madness, Jack raised his repeater again and fired, while the mare was going at full tilt, and had the satisfaction of seeing the ruffian sink back in his saddle, and roll to the ground.

Never checking the speed of the mare, he dashed on, and as he passed the spot where the man had fallen, he saw to his surprise that it was Old Firefly, *alias* Revolver Jake, whom he had shot!

This discovery solved the question as to the strange old fellow's visit to the cave; he had been there, undoubtedly, at the instigation of the Tremaines.

This occurring to Jack, he instantly reined in his horse, and dismounted.

The traitor was not dead but had been stunned by the bullet, and was now quite insensible.

A hurried search of his clothing and saddlebags, satisfied Jack that he had not found the hidden money.

Remounting his horse he continued on more leisurely toward Deadwood, for seeing nothing of pursuit, he concluded that the outlaws had given it up.

By this time it was growing quite dusk, and he was obliged to let his horse walk, for the gulch was narrow and rocky, and the gigantic overhanging rocks in places entirely shut out what little light struggled through the approaching gloom.

On thinking over the adventures of the past forty-eight hours, Jack concluded that it was about time for a cessation; but in this calculation he was disappointed, for a new adventure befell him when he was least expecting it.

He was passing in under one of the overhanging jutting of rock, when he was suddenly snatched from his saddle by a rope that tightened around his waist, and found himself swinging in mid-air, powerless to defend himself, for the rope that had caught him had also pinioned his hands to his side.

For a moment he hung swaying in the air—then he was pulled upward by some unseen power—up—up—up; it seemed as if he would never stop rising—as if he were being drawn up to the very sky itself.

He had about come to this conclusion, when he heard the sound of human voices, which was a relief.

Presently, more dead than alive, he was hauled up on top of the ledge, more than a hundred feet above his original starting point, and found himself, to his great surprise, in the presence of the Indian girl, Wild Jo, and a brawny copper-skinned Indian, who had evidently done the work of hoisting, for he was puffing and blowing like a porpoise.

A few sticks were dimly burning near by, furnishing the only light upon the subject.

"Wild Flower is glad the pale-face safely escaped," the Indian girl said, extending her hand. "Wild Flower and Weptomo were coming to your rescue, when Weptomo discovered you riding down the gulch, and lassoed you. Is the pale-face miner glad to see Wild Jo?"

"Well, to use the vernacular of the mines, I shed opine that I am, ef so be you've got some grub handy!" Jack replied, shaking the maiden's hand.

"There is plenty of food in the Locked Valley, which is not far away," announced the girl. "If the pale-face will permit his eyes to be blindfolded, he will soon be placed within reach of plenty of food."

"Correct, little gal! I'll trust you, I reckon,

for I don't believe you'd betray me to peril," Jack said. "So go ahead with your Centennial clam-bake."

The brawny savage, whose name was Weptomo, accordingly lifted Jack upon a horse that was standing near, first taking care to blindfold his eyes.

Then Jack felt himself riding away, he knew not where—knew nothing of his strange journey except that it was through a remarkably rough tract of country, which he could tell as the horse ascended or descended dizzy declivities.

For hours, it seemed, he rode on, and could hear Wild Jo and Weptomo talking by his side in their Indian tongue, and so concluded that they were traveling on foot.

At last the horse stopped, and the blindfold was removed from Jack's eyes.

On looking around, he perceived that he was in what appeared to be a deep pit, for mighty walls of rock towered up perpendicularly on every hand to a height Jack's gaze could not fathom, in the darkness.

The bottom of the strange pit or Locked Valley, as Wild Jo had termed it, did not comprise more than two acres of space, and was sandy and pebbly. A row of little thatched huts fringed the space, seven in number, and in front of each of these burned a camp-fire built of pitchy pine cones.

At one side of the pit, a stream of water poured down in a silvery cascade, and gurgling across the bottom of the strangely locked valley, disappeared through a crevice in the rock. Mile after mile underground must this strange current go, ere it emerged again into the outer world.

"You are in the Locked Valley—the home of Wild Flower and Mountain King," the Indian girl explained, stepping forward and motioning for Jack to dismount. "Dismount, and I will show you to the Mountain King."

"Correct! I'm agreeable to that or most anything that savors of hash," Jack declared. "Somehow my stomach feels like a collapsed balloon."

"Food shall be placed before you," Jo answered, leading the way toward the largest hut of the lot. On entering, Jack found himself in an apartment such as he had little expected to behold in the bowels of the mountain. A carpet was laid upon the ground—chairs were placed around—a lamp burned upon a small deal table, while in one corner was a bedstead and bed, and in another a box-shaped case resembling a desk of the old-fashion pattern.

A man was lounging in an easy-chair near the table, engaged in smoking a long-stemmed pipe, and looked up with a start as Jo and Jack entered.

The second glance Jack got at the man discovered him to be a *white man* instead of an Indian, although his hair was black and worn down over his shoulders. His attire was that of the ordinary American citizen.

"Here, father, is the young miner of whom I spoke," Wild Jo said, leading Jack forward and presenting him. "I am sure you will like him very much."

"Does the Wild Flower like him?" the man asked, shaking Jack's hand.

"Of course I do," was the girl's reply, now in pure unbroken English.

"Then Onoboko will welcome the pale-face, for Wild Flower's choice is Onoboko's choice. What is the name of the young pale-face?"

"My name is Jack Hoyle, at your service," Jack announced.

"A name suggestive of the game of cards, sir," the Mountain King had to declare. "Be seated, sir. Josie, you may bring in some meat from the cookery, and also some coffee and bread."

The girl departed, with a bow, and then the Mountain King turned to Jack.

"Now, my friend! How like you the Locked Valley and its people?"

"Don't give me hard questions, at first, or I shall not be able to solve them," Jack protested. "I have seen so little of the valley or its population, that I can not say how I like either. I supposed you and the young lady to be Indians, but I perceive that you are both as fully Americans as myself."

"Very true. We are only Indians when we paint our skin. I am sure that you will like it here, well enough to make it your permanent home."

"I seriously doubt that. I believe I should prefer life above ground."

"Pshaw! you will change your mind when you get acquainted, and learn of the golden wealth of this pitfall."

"Then there is gold here?"

"Ay! gold in nuggets, gold in sparkling dust, gold in drifted quartz. The very ground you stand upon is pregnant with the precious stuff."

"How do you get out of the pit?" Jack demanded.

"That is a secret we must withhold from you," the Mountain King replied, smiling. "You might try a thousand years, and you could never get out without my aid, or that of Jo or some of the men."

"Then I suppose you and those you have mentioned are the only ones in possession of the secret of this place's existence."

"We are. No other mortal than those who are present in this valley now, know of the existence of this pit of gold, or if any hunters and explorers have ever noticed it in their travels, they have paid no more attention to it than they do to a thousand and one other fissures and chasms to be found in the face of this wild, mountainous country."

"How did you discover it?"

"Curiosity led me to lower myself down here, and I discovered my big bonanza. That was many years ago, when with a party of trappers I ventured into this country. I immediately took possession, and have occasionally added a trusty Indian to my employ, until I have a band of ten peaceable fellows collected, who will stick by me as long as I live."

"Then according to your story, you must be immensely rich."

"I will show you," the mountain hermit miner said, taking the lamp and going to his desk, which he unlocked. "Come and feast your eyes, and then draw your own conclusions as to my pecuniary possessions."

Jack did feast his eyes, and beheld a sight of dazzling splendor, such as might have been the vision of a dream. Gold in nuggets, large and small—gold in trays of glittering sands and dust—gold in molten bars, and in pouches—more gold by far than he had ever seen.

"That is not all," the hermit said, with a smile. "I have more buried in strong boxes beneath the ground on which we stand—more, perhaps than the whole yield of the rest of the Black Hills country for the last three years."

"Then you must be worth more than any other man in the world—more than the famed Rothschilds or Vanderbilts!" Jack cried, wonderingly.

"Perhaps you are right. I don't know just how many dollars or cents I have; I never counted it."

"Why do you longer remain here, when you are the possessor of all this wealth? Why not go out into the world and enjoy yourself?"

"Bah! What is the world to me! I care nothing for it. It treated me shabbily when I was poor, and now in my prosperity I equally scorn it. No! no! I shall never leave my Locked Valley home!"

CHAPTER XI.

ONOBOKO'S PROPOSAL—A MINSTREL VENTURE.

At this juncture, Wild Jo brought in a steaming tray of roast meat, coffee and corn bread, and placed it on the table, together with plates, knives and forks and sugar, and invited Jack to partake of the repast. And you may be sure he did so with a will, for he was very hungry, and the meal was literally too tempting for anything.

After he had satisfied his appetite, and signified his desire to retire, a savage was summoned who guided him to another and smaller tent, which was fitted up with a bed of leaves, furs and blankets—good enough for a king to lie upon.

Jack at once tumbled in, and slept soundly until morning, although he was visited by dreams of gold, in all its glittering forms, as he had seen it in the Mountain King's cabinet.

When he awoke it was still dark in the tent, but on striking a match and looking at his watch, he found it was the usual time for daylight to appear.

On stepping from the lodge he found the pit enveloped in a semi-gloom, only a little better than when he entered.

Gazing upward, he was able to catch a glimpse of the blue sky, but it was many, many feet away. Even to gaze out of the pit was an effort.

So he concluded that it was never any lighter in the Locked Valley than at present, except when there were camp fires burning. The fact was evidenced by savages being engaged on the banks of the stream, in washing sand, while others were blasting out rock from the southern wall of the pit, each working in the light of a torch held by another savage.

The Mountain King came from his lodge, and approached Jack with a smile.

"How do you like the situation, my young friend? Do you not find it pleasant here?"

"Far from it, if you leave out your daughter and yourself. I prefer more light on the subject."

"Ah! you will soon get accustomed to this semi-darkness."

"I don't care to try. When you get ready, I shall be very glad to have you drop me somewhere in the outer world."

"Well, we'll see about that. Come to my lodge, and I will talk with you."

Jack obeyed, and was soon seated at the table in the lodge.

"The reason I had you brought here," the old man went on to state, "is because I am getting old and blind, and want a man to take charge of things, who is honest and capable. I left the choice for my child to make, and she selected you, and caused you to be brought hither. She is young, and of a faithful nature, and has already fallen in love with you. I therefore want you to make this your permanent home, take charge of my affairs, and marry my daughter. You can soon enrich yourself out of the golden sands of the valley, and be as rich as I!"

"But, what good do all your riches do you, living as you do in this isolated spot? No, I could not think of making this my permanent home, for I am already engaged to a young lady in the East, who is very dear to me, and I would be cruelly treating her, should I marry another."

"Very true, and you are perfectly right in wishing to return to her. To-night, after you have sworn never to mention this mine to mortal ears, you shall be taken from the pit, and be put upon the trail to Crook City, for it would not be safe for you to go to Deadwood, at present."

"But, first, I have money to get, which I buried in the mountain cavern!"

"No, you have not. The money you buried was found, dug up, and brought hither by my daughter, to prevent its being stolen by old Firefly, the road-agent."

And from his cabinet the King of the Mountains took a brown package, and handed it to Jack, who upon examination found it to be as he had left it—twenty thousand dollars, lacking a couple of hundred.

"Is it all right?" the hermit asked.

"All right!" Jack replied.

During the remainder of the day he visited with the hermit and his pretty daughter, and examined things of interest about the pit-mine—the wondrous gold field in the bowels of the earth.

As night drew on supper was prepared, and all ate together, with a relish. When the meal was dispatched, Onoboko said:

"Now, Mr. Hoyle, before I can permit you to leave the pit, I must request you to take oath that you will never mention the existence or location of this mine to any mortal. Of course if you ever choose to return here, you shall be welcome."

The King of the Mountains then named an oath, which Jack repeated after him. He then shook hands with the hermit and his pretty daughter, after which he bade them good-by, was blindfolded by the servant, Weptomo, and led from the tent, and placed upon a horse.

Then they started, with the servant evidently leading the horse, and although he listened and endeavored to detect the way out of the strange Locked Valley, Jack was unsuccessful. No sound did he hear more than the tramp of the horse, and that of the Indian, to betray the secret route.

For hours the ride continued, mostly ascending. It seemed to Jack that it was a good twenty-four hours ere the horse stopped, and the Indian removed the bandage from his eyes, and freed his arms.

They were at this juncture in a wild mountain gulch, with pine-fringed mountains rising on either side, and a wagon-trail running before them.

"The young pale-face is free to go," Weptomo said, handing Jack the bridle-reins. "By following the wagon-trail as his horse is headed, he will soon reach Crook City. Weptomo has said it."

And then turning, the redskin went back down the gulch, leaving Jack to pursue an opposite course, which he did with alacrity, for he was anxious to get out of the Black Hills country.

Enough of roughing it he had had, to satisfy him that he was not cut out for a borderman.

All the rest of the day—for day had dawned when Weptomo left him—he spent riding, and when night again approached, he rode into the

little mining town known as Crook City. Here he remained several days, and then took the trail and rode on for Bismarck, Dakota.

One day, as he was riding along, he found in the very bottom of his saddle-bags that what he supposed to be two hunks of jerked meat were not meat at all, but half a dozen pouches of gold dust.

He recognized the treasure as the same he had seen in the Mountain King's cabinet! Had the old man volunteered the offering, or had his daughter stolen it, and taken this way of expressing her love for Jack?

This was the question, and one that Jack was never able to satisfactorily solve.

Of course he could not return to the pit, and so decided that the gold was his, to use as he pleased.

It was quite an acquisition to his small fortune; after all his visit to the Black Hills country had not been so unprofitable.

Before he reached Bismarck he encountered a terrific snow-storm, which delayed him several weeks—for it was now November weather in dead earnest, and he had to put up at a ranch on the way.

For various unimportant reasons he did not reach Chicago until the first day of January.

In the meantime, he had disposed of his gold for ten thousand dollars, so that when he arrived in Chicago, he had in clean cash a trifle over twenty-nine thousand dollars.

Resolving not to let the amount decrease, he let out the whole amount except a thousand dollars, on safe security, at eight per cent interest for a term of three years. With the other thousand in store for an emergency, he began to look around for some employment for the remainder of the winter.

Having acquaintance in Thespian circles, he soon found a dozen minstrel performers of more or less note and engaged them at a small salary for a tour through the West.

From Chicago they struck along the line of the Union Pacific, stopping at every point where a hall could be secured, whether in a city or a village.

As a result they met with fair success, having the best business, of course, in the small towns.

The show ran under the name of the Burton Bro's Combination.

Occasionally an amusing incident would occur, which would liven up the spirits of both manager and company, and serve as the butt of much laughter, for many weeks to come.

One evening an old, garrulous woman presented herself at the door of the hall, in a little town called Cayote, where the troupe were to attempt a performance, with the prospect of a slim house, for the town was small, and the weather stormy.

The old lady was attired in a short, woolen petticoat, with an ancient-patterned bonnet upon her head, and stogy boots upon her feet. She was followed by six frowsy-headed little urchins in rags, all of whom were born at one time, judging by appearances!

"Be you the boss of this consarn?" she asked, pausing with arms akimbo, before Jack who was acting in capacity of ticket-seller.

"Yes, ma'am, I expect I am," Jack replied, courteously. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes, on course there is!" the old lady replied. "I wanten know what sort o' show this is goin' ter be."

"A first class, original minstrel entertainment," Jack assured.

"Git out—a first class original fiddle-de-de!" the woman retorted, contemptuously. "Don't give me none o' your stuck up language, young feller, fur I'm ther mother o' a ranch full o' children, an' ye can't flumigate yer highfalutin' ter me worth a cent. What I want ter know—is this a straight, up-an'-down nigger show?"

"Yes, ma'am!—It's a clean, out-and-out nigger show," Jack asserted, seriously.

"Waal, then I reckon we'll take it in. I war to a nigger show, years ago, an' only paid two-an'-sixpence fer me an' my beau to get in. How much will ye charge fer me an' my boys? Ther rest o' the family hain't got here yet, but they'll be along pretty soon, an' kin pay their own toll."

"Our price is twenty-five cents each; tickets for yourself and boys will cost you one dollar and seventy-five."

"Git out! What d'ye take us fer? One dollar seventy-five jest ter see a nigger show! I'd like to see myself givin' that—I would! One dollar seventy-five, indeed! Give you fifty cents, young feller, an' not a cent more. There now! Will you take it, or shall we go hum?"

Jack stepped to the door and gave a despairing glance up and down the street, and seeing

no crowd, he took the fifty cents and passed the old woman and her flock in.

Another time, in one of the new towns along the Union Pacific, their audience consisted of one solitary pilgrim in slouch hat, red shirt and buckskin breeches, whom all the funniest sayings of the end men, or the most ludicrous farcical situations, could not arouse into a smile. At the conclusion of the show he gave a sigh of relief, and "puckacheed!"

Reaching San Francisco, in March, Jack figured up his expenses, counted his cash, and found himself just a thousand dollars ahead.

This was not so bad, and he resolved to continue on from San Francisco, up north as far as Oregon, as spring was opening.

In San Francisco he added a balloon ascensionist and rope-walker, by the name of La Cruz—a wicked looking customer, but withal a good performer in his line of business.

Business continued fine until they reached Portland, Oregon, when an incident of adventure occurred, which Jack had been expecting.

On waking one morning he found that he had been robbed in the night, not only of his watch and money, but of a valuable diamond pin and a pair of studs.

Besides, Styles and Mack, the end men of the troupe, had lost their money and watches, and the barytone singer was out a dozen pairs of shirts, collars and cuffs, in addition to his money.

As the Spaniard, La Cruz, was missing, it was naturally concluded that he was the culprit. Accordingly Jack set the sheriff in pursuit, and in the meantime cruised around the neighboring towns until his money should be restored to him.

This was shortly done.

La Cruz was overtaken by the sheriff, and promptly lynched, and the stolen goods recovered and restored to Jack and his company.

They then pulled out of Oregon into Nevada, and then through into Colorado, visiting the principal mining towns, and meeting with abundant success.

At last, early in May, Jack closed the season at Denver, and started East, over three thousand dollars better off than when he started out.

In Kansas he invested a thousand dollars in a small stock ranch.

As he was passing a few days in St. Louis, he saw a chance to purchase a river excursion steamer for nineteen hundred dollars, and immediately made the purchase.

Then, with fifty dollars in his pocket, he started for as far East as his money would bring him, not knowing what next to turn to, to make money.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MEXICAN MINES.

HE lingered in Chicago and Cleveland a few weeks, doing odd jobs of work, and earning sufficient money to defray his expenses.

The last week of his stay in Cleveland, he met Harry Hunter, the gambler-detective, from Lowell.

He did not know him until he saw Hunter's name upon the hotel register, and the man was pointed out to him, with heavy mustache and earlets, and quite a natty appearance.

"I suppose you don't know me," Jack said, approaching him.

"Well, no, I don't," the other replied, after a keen scrutiny. "I don't recognize you."

"My name is Jack Hoyle!"

"Phew! You don't say!" and the gambler arose and shook hands, warmly.

"Where did you come from? You're the very chap I most wanted to see."

"Oh! I've been roughing it, here and there," Jack replied. "I came latest from the West."

"So did I. Have been after Addison Tremaine, you know, up in the Black Hills."

"With what success?"

"Oh! I waylaid him, knocked him down, and took possession of a round fifty thousand dollars, which I found on his person. Then I took the first stage East. If you want half, come along with me!"

They soon ascended to the detective's room, and Jack was placed in possession of half of the amount recaptured, as per previous agreement.

Jack felt that his prosperity was too good to be true. When he had offered Hunter half he could get of the stolen money, he had no idea the fellow would ever get a penny.

But he had, and Jack was so much the richer for the bargain.

The next question was—how and where should he invest his money to advantage.

It was a question that he could not readily decide upon.

There were plenty of lands in the West to be

bought cheaply, but it was rarely that enough could be got out of them right away to pay the taxes.

There were other chances for investment, but Jack could see none that quite struck his fancy, so he headed for New York.

On his arrival there he was surprised to learn that the liniment venture in which he had embarked, a few years before, had grown into a business of enormous proportions, and that the doctor had grown independently rich out of it. Jack had suspected that he had been tricked, when he sold out so cheaply.

After a week's stay in the Metropolis, he purchased a half interest in a paying dry-goods business, for twenty thousand dollars; then invested another sum of twenty-five hundred in street railway stock in Philadelphia, which he had now chosen as his future home.

He then went to Baltimore and purchased a peach orchard for three thousand dollars, and built a neat summer residence upon it.

He then took a trip down to Lowell, to find that the Bonds had moved away, but was unable to ascertain where they had gone. One lady labored under the supposition that they had gone upon a European tour, while another believed they had moved into some of the larger Western cities.

Jack was disappointed, but, hopeful of finding them he set out for the West, and visited all the cities of any importance until he reached San Francisco, and examining the directories without the hoped-for result.

The name of Bond proved to be an uncommon one, and nothing of the good rector and his daughter could Jack find.

Discouraged at his ill-success, he began to look around him once more for a chance to speculate.

Nothing offering, he joined a party of Californians, who were going down into northern Mexico to dig for gold, hoping to be able to fight off the Greasers and reds until they could make their pile out of the rich mineral beds that lie unworked in the heart of Chihuahua.

The party comprised Old Bill McKenzie, Cap. Doolittle, Jerry Bonchan, Sam Piercy, Rattlesnake Rube and Bison Tom, besides Jack, making seven in all, well mounted and well armed.

The journey down into Mexico was attended by no incident worthy of mention, and they arrived in the place selected for operations about the middle of October.

It was in a solemn, deserted valley, through which a stream of water flowed, and around which a deep pinyon forest encircled gloriously.

It was miles from any human habitation, McKenzie said, and they were in no danger of being disturbed by Greasers or reds.

The bottom of the valley was bedded with white sand, several feet in depth, and in this McKenzie claimed was gold enough to repay them for their trouble in coming.

This statement was soon verified by washing a considerable amount of gold out of a panful of dust.

The gold-hunters before proceeding to settle operations built them a cabin, and each agreed that all the gold divided into equal shares among the seven would be the fair way of conducting the thing, each man to work eight hours a day, unless sick, and to skirmish for his own "chuck."

After the cabin was completed, and a day's hunt had laid in enough deer-meat to last a month, they all set to work with pan and shovel in their search after the precious metal.

A good trench had been constructed leading a small part of the valley stream into the sluice-boxes, thus making the washing process a great deal easier.

The first day's labor was highly gratifying, even beyond their most sanguine expectations, for the sands of the valley-bottom yielded the golden particles handsomely.

On quitting work, they all assembled in the cabin. Bill McKenzie weighed the joint collection, and reckoned it worth fifty dollars to the share!

"Oh! I tell ye, we've struck a bonanza!" he cried, jubilantly. "As long as old Bill can salt away fifty a day, thar ain't a-goin' ter be no grumbin' in this yere camp!"

"Nary a time," Rattlesnake Rube agreed. "We've feathered our bed fust-class, an' hev got it all to ourselves, an' ther first galoot as kicks or turns traitor, shall be hung up fer buzzard chuck."

No one seemed to have any desire to grumble, and for six months they worked steadily in that lone valley, without discovery or molestation.

One morning at the end of that time, Old Bill McKenzie came rushing into the cabin, from an early morning hunt, flushed and panting.

"Git yer tools ready!" he cried, "fer there's a gang o' Greasers comin' inter ther valley, an' we've got ter fight fer it. We mustn't give ther durned louts no quarter, or they'll cut us all up inter mince-meat. Let every man remember that he's fightin' fer his gold an' fer his gizzard."

The men accordingly armed themselves, and stationed themselves at the cabin loop-holes, ready to fight to the bitter end.

The Greasers soon came charging down into the valley with yells and screeches—a dozen of them there were, well mounted and armed, and as ruffianly a looking crowd as is often met, even on the far frontier.

"Give it to 'em!" Old Bill yelled, as they came charging up. "Every man pick his galoot, and pop the question to him in a skintific manner."

A volley was accordingly poured into the Greasers' ranks, and six tumbled from the saddle out of seven shots.

The other six, evidently surprised at the sudden attack, turned their horses and spurred back into the shelter of the pinyon forest, before the miners could get in a second blast.

"That settles our hash!" Old Bill cried, grimly. "We may as well pack up our traps and git ready to skin out."

"Why so?" Jack asked.

"Because we ken't mine heer, enny more, I reckon, arter lettin' them Greasers git away. They'll send for reinforcements, now, an' in less'n two days, or three at furthest, thar'll be enough o' ther blamed cusses heer ter lick us out root an' branch. Our only course is to puckachee while we've got a chance."

"But mebbe we ain't got even that," Bison Ben remarked. "It's likely only one o' the gang has gone for reinforcements, while the rest remain and look out for us."

"I don't keer a cuss about that," Old Bill grunted—"not a darned cent. I kin outwit 'em, fer ducats. Fetch out the box o' gold, an' we'll divide it, an' every galoot kin hev his sheer. I've did all ther minin' I'm goin' ter in this yere valley, an' them as is goin' ter perigrinate w' me, kin git ready twixt now and dark."

As none had any desire to remain behind without Bill McKenzie, there was a general decision to get out of the wilderness while they could.

The box of gold was brought out, and contents weighed into seven separate and equal divisions. They had mined one hundred and fifty-six days, and had averaged fifty dollars a day apiece! bringing to each man seven thousand and eight hundred dollars in gold, or fifty-four thousand and six hundred dollars all told.

After the division was made, each man packed up such traps as he desired to take away with him, and when night again came, Old Bill McKenzie led the retreat from the valley of gold, where they had so long toiled unmolested.

Through the grim pinyon forest they silently stole upon their horses, and by Old Bill's clever planning avoided meeting with the Greasers.

Early in July they left Mexico, arriving in San Francisco in August.

CHAPTER XIII.

OFF FOR THE OLD WORLD AND HOME AGAIN FOR GOOD!

THE five years of his exile now being up, and being the possessor of a considerable fortune, Jack resolved to go to Philadelphia and purchase and fit him up a home, and then search again for the Bonds.

He had long since given up the hope of redeeming his father's estates, and knowing that he had made money enough to support him all the natural term of his life, he resolved to take it easier.

He accordingly journeyed to the Centennial city, and purchased a handsome residence on an aristocratic and fashionable thoroughfare, which he furnished after a moderate style.

He then began to wonder where he should next look for the Bonds. Impulse led him to take a trip down to Lowell, and while there he went to the cemetery and adorned his father and mother's graves with several costly and appropriate ornaments.

Going to Boston, he engaged passage in a steamer for Liverpool, and was safely landed, a few weeks later, in the city of London.

After viewing the sights in this city, and surroundings, he visited Paris, but soon got disgusted with the French, and departed for Milan.

One evening as he was at the theater to hear a noted singer, an usher brought him a note bearing the request that he immediately call upon the Mlle. Lorina, behind the scenes.

Not a little surprised, he followed the usher to the green-room, and beheld there, waiting to greet him, and looking royally beautiful in her costly stage attire, one whom he would quicker

have expected to find at the antipodes—little Lily Thorpe, whom he had once had as a performer in his circus.

"Oh! Mr. Hoyle, I am so glad to see you!" she exclaimed, putting out her jeweled hand. "I peeped from behind the curtain, and recognized you as one of the audience, and could not resist the temptation to call you. Will you remain here? I wait to talk with you after the opera."

Of course Jack could do no less than comply, and then the operatic star danced gayly away, and soon after Jack heard her clear admiral voice, accompanied by the strains of an operatic orchestra. Later there was applause, and then Mlle. Lorina re-entered the green-room.

"Have I tired you? If so I am sorry. The audience never knows when to stop applauding, you know. Come! my carriage awaits at the stage door. I shall appoint you my chaperon home."

So Jack accompanied her to the grand hotel where she stopped, and promised to call on the following day.

He did so, and they had a long chat, together. "I came to Milan to learn to be a singer," she explained, in answer to Jack's inquiries. "I had saved enough money to defray my expenses for a year, and in that time I progressed favorably, and you now see me enjoying the honors of a star."

Jack very much enjoyed the renewal of her acquaintance, but a telegram summoned him back to America. It was from Bessie Bond, and stated that she was ill in Philadelphia, and desired to see him.

So he bade adieu to Lorina, and took the train for Havre where he struck the steamer homeward bound.

The weather was very rough, and the steamship labored very severely in the mid-ocean, but finally made New York harbor, safely. Jack immediately went to the depot for Philadelphia trains, to purchase a ticket.

As he was paying his fare, a young lady, deeply veiled stepped up and called for a ticket for Philadelphia, also.

The moment he heard her speak, Jack thought he recognized the voice, and watched her from a respectful distance until he saw her go aboard the ferry, when he followed her, hoping she would raise her veil.

But she did not, even when she took a seat in the Philadelphia train.

Resolved to test his suspicion, Jack approached her, and raising his hat courteously, said:

"Perhaps I am mistaken, but is this not Miss Bond, formerly of Lowell?"

"I am Miss Bond, yes, sir," a faint voice replied. "But I do not recognize you, sir."

"Perhaps if you were to raise your veil, you might make me out to be Jack Hoyle," Jack replied, with a smile.

The veil was thrown back instantly, exposing Bessie's pretty face, and a soft white hand sought the young speculator's.

"Jack! Jack! Is it really you? I am so glad!" Bessie cried. "I have been wishing so much you would come back."

"Well, I've been hunting for you, and the moment I received your telegram, announcing your illness, I hastened back from Europe."

"My illness? my telegram?" Bessie exclaimed, putting up her hands. "Why I haven't written a telegram announcing any illness on my part."

"The deuce you haven't! Didn't you send me this?" and Jack seated himself beside her, and gave her the dispatch he had received in Milan.

Bessie looked it over, and shook her little head.

"No. I did not send it. We have been living here in New York, until poor papa died, four months ago. I was going to Philadelphia to-day to accept a position as saleswoman in a store."

"Well, you may go, and I will install you as mistress of my household as soon as a clergyman can tie a knot. Eh? what do you say to that, my sweet one?"

We will not chronicle the answer, but state that there was a quiet wedding a few weeks later, in which Jack and Bessie were the participants.

Upon sending a detective to the house in Philadelphia where he had been telegraphed to come to, Jack found that the Tremaines had been there, but had gone. What plot they had contemplated he could not tell, for he never heard of them again.

Here we leave Jack and his wife enjoying themselves on the wealth that Jack's perseverance and industry had accumulated.

Long may he, and all other boys of his stamp, live and prosper!

THE END.

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